

Revisiting the Idea of Belongingness and Alienation in Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* through Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the Carnavalesque, Grotesque, and Masks

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Abstract

Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* was a reaction to the mounting hypocrisy before and after First World War. Yank’s existential crisis after being humiliated by Mildred, the flag bearer of capitalism in the play, is O’Neill’s use of expressionism which addresses the issue of alienation in the post-war world. This play, therefore, instigates the audience for social awareness against Yank’s otherization, by a capitalist system which conditions him to harbour a wrong idea of “belonging”. Mildred’s initiative to serve the poor at Manhattan’s lower east side but discrimination against Yank is a veiled reality. Yank as a filthy beast is an idea that Mildred has created and doesn’t necessarily mean that Yank is animal-like. O’Neill uses masked characters and the grotesque body of the Masculine Primitive to create ironic humour and subvert ideas created by people in power. Yank’s obsession with the idea of “belonging” is deliberately used as a comic element because he belongs neither with the Mildreds nor with the Gorillas. As the subtitle *A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life in Eight Scenes* reveals, *The Hairy Ape* is Eugene O’Neill’s social satire. This play read through Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of the carnivalesque (as a social criticism of rising American capitalism), the grotesque body (Yank’s dehumanized apelike body), and the use of masks (Yank’s face with coal dust and Mildred’s milky white dress) laughs at power by challenging ideas like Social Darwinism and Masculine Primitive in the play and the early 20th century America.

Keywords: carnivalesque, expressionism, grotesque, Social Darwinism, Bakhtin, O’Neill



As the year 1922 was a culmination point of literary modernism, the world of literature began to add extraordinary literary works. These works not only broke conventional forms of writing but also themes in all spheres of art and culture. Expressionist theatre which started in Germany in the 20th century sought to include the spectator's participation in mass social awakening. Expressionist theatre also attacked the passive depiction of Realism. Eugene O'Neill was an American playwright and had won the Noble Prize in 1936. His plays like *Beyond the Horizon*, *The Emperor Jones*, *The Hairy Ape*, *Desire Under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* was studied in schools and colleges; and while their significance started fading in the post-war era his other plays like *The Iceman Cometh*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten* and *Long Day's Journey* reconfirmed his reputation as a writer who regularly commented on the social deterioration of his time (Manheim 1). Most of O'Neill's plays are expressionistic with characters of strange temperament instead of conventional human beings. These exaggerated characters metaphorically satirize the corruption and hypocrisy of the people in power. *The Hairy Ape: A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life in Eight Scenes* is an expressionist play both performed and published in the year 1922. Read through Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque and the grotesque, *The Hairy Ape* establishes itself as a satire of modern life (Mildred and capitalism) and ancient life (Yank normalizing apelike working condition).

Carnivalized writing aims at all sorts of "inversions, parodies and discrownings" (Dentith 63) of power. When François Rabelais was writing he wanted to explore the culture of the Middle-age and the popular festivities of Renaissance that would show "the flowering of a gay, affirmative, and militantly anti-authoritarian attitude to life, founded upon a joyful acceptance of the materiality of the body" (64). Carnavalesque includes the celebration of the grotesque body which collectively protests against the "humourless seriousness of official culture." (64) This official culture frowns at the liberation of both mind and body. Therefore, a continuous suppression of the liberation of the body not only leads to psychological alienation but also forms an artificial idea of the pure body. Such artificial notion is formed by rejecting the eternal truth that parts of our body are grotesque and that is what makes us live. According to Dentith, Rabelais's work showed that "fragmentation and suppression" had fallen upon the European high culture since Renaissance. Embracing bodily materiality would therefore mean rejecting the "pure" body. Carnavalesque as a literary mode then subverts the preconceived ideas of the dominant style created by people in power. In the process, such writing also uses humour against power to erase the predetermined structures of power. Carnavalesque was a term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin in his book *Rabelais and His World* published in 1965. When Rabelais wrote *Gargantua and Pantagruel* based on which Bakhtin has written *Rabelais and His World*, his main aim was to find the permissible and impermissible performances as an outcome of repression by social institutions in power during the Renaissance. Bakhtin may have started his work on Rabelais as a visionary revolution against a Power that conventionally was destined to mean something related to "folk-humour" but reading *Rabelais and His World* today is open-ended. Performance of carnivals both literally or textually is about the performance of vast multitude or elaborate portrayal of literary characters who aim to subvert coercive power through laughter. Therefore, a carnival is



complementary to expressionism. Its performance, spectatorship, and theme expect the all-inclusive participation of the audience to stimulate social change.

In *The Hairy Ape* O'Neill satirizes the altered idea of the material body which Yank celebrates. That celebrating the grotesque isn't about physical prowess is used as a method of expressionism. The audience watching this play will question their exemplification of physical prowess or their celebration of abysmal working conditions. This play is also known for sharing its similarities with Menippean satire "in which a group of loquacious eccentrics, pendants, literary people, and representatives of various professions or philosophical point of view serve to make ludicrous the attitudes and the viewpoints they typify by the arguments they urge in their support" (Abrams and Harpham 247). *The Hairy Ape* is a "proletarian chorus" performed by Yank who carnivalizes "capitalism's repressive upper classes through virtuosic movement" (Posner) through his excess embodiment of capitalistic expectation that is to become a "hairy ape". Dasia N. Posner writes that "Yank a worker in the stokehole of an ocean liner, struggles to feel human after Mildred, a first-class passenger, treats him like an ape" but Yank already embodies traits of an ape and that is why he boasts his physical strength. The audience will likewise, be compelled to question their aristocratic superficialities when they watch Mildred perform. That Mildred too thinks he is ape-like shows her (capitalist) tendency to discriminate based on appearance and social status. The three elements of carnivalesque are "excess", "grotesque" and "laughter" in which the grotesque is "the collective ancestral body of all the people" (Bakhtin 19) and excess is exaggerated performance to evoke sensation or reaction among spectators. Yank, who is the protagonist of the play, performs a carnival in two ways. Firstly, he criticizes the idea of the pure body symbolized by Mildred dressed in white by enacting an ape. Secondly, he performs a carnival and brings about a tragic end of his own life to show how ideas like Capitalism, War, Social Darwinism, and Masculine Primitive were responsible for creating alienated men in the modern age. Mikhail Bakhtin created the concept of grotesque by creating a difference between grotesque and classical bodies. In *The Hairy Ape*, we see the third type of body which is the primitive body. The classical body which is seen as the pure was formed not only as an opposite of the grotesque body but also the primitive. Likewise, Mildred's idea of the perfect body eliminates the grotesque. Yank, on the other hand, doesn't artificially enact the primitive as excess, but derives it from the concept of Masculine Primitive. Yank mechanically works almost like a slave in the hands of the capitalist owners and fails to realize his abysmal state as he is a modern man unable to think. A socially conscious reader will immediately identify with the ironic representation of Yank enacting the alienated man of the 20th century. This satiric representation of both Yank and Mildred is the reason why this play is a comedy. Eugene O'Neill's ambition was to laugh at the two extreme forms of life: ancient and modern. As people began to create ideologies based on Darwin's propositions such as Social Darwinism by capitalists and Masculine Primitive by working-class O'Neill thought it fitting to parody-ify both because both were equally existentially dreadful.

The first scene begins with stokehole workers working at the stokehole of a transatlantic liner. The ocean liner, an invention of modern technology represents the first of the machines that played important role in the First World War. Because it is a "transatlantic" ship the word Atlantic has greater significance. The Atlantic Ocean after the First World War was used by developed countries such as America to create an idea of the "old world" and the "new world" which today can be seen in the division between the



Global North and the Global South. The idea that countries to the west of the Atlantic Ocean were civilized and the countries to the east of the Atlantic Ocean were uncivilized is problematic and racist. The men at the stokehole of the liner are dressed in dungaree pants, ugly shoes, passing beer bottles among each other. Their exuberant celebration of life even at the “cramped space in the bowels of a ship” (O’Neill Sc I) contrasts the lifeless Mildred and her aunt on the spacious deck of the ship. O’Neill writes at the outset that:

The treatment of this scene, or of any other scene in the play, should by no means be naturalistic. The effect sought after is a cramped space in the bowels of a ship, imprisoned by white steel. (O’Neill Sc I)

Bowels as Mikhail Bakhtin writes, is a part of the grotesque body that exaggerates and performs a carnival. The workers reside at the “bowels” and it is a celebrated place according to Yank. The bowel is a celebratory prop in the grotesque and although the playwright criticizes it because it depicts the abysmal working condition of the workers it shows that because of the stokehole the ship moves. Yank takes pride in residing at the stokehole but his obsession with his work and muscle power is unwanted and therefore depicted as ape-like. When O’Neill is himself describing the stokehole as the “bowels” of the ship “imprisoned by white steel” it is given that the stokehole is inhabitable. Yank is nonetheless happy to an extent that not only he loves his work but is proud of the fact that because of his effort the ship runs. The mouth is an opening in the body and therefore grotesque, something that makes us live. Yank claims he can “breathe and swallow coal dust”, which to him is like “fresh air” and “food” (Sc I). If he can swallow dust and smoke he is robbed of his humanity because a human being is not supposed to “breathe and swallow coal dust”. He says “It takes a man to work in hell.” And by telling this he establishes that the stokehole is hell. However working in hell (stokehole) is a matter of great pride to Yank. His idea of being a “man” who can work in “hell” arises from the early 20th century adoption of Masculine Primitive among the working class. It is one of the wrong ideologies which O’Neill was writing against. Yank’s ability to swallow or breathe coal dust taints the essence of being human. At times his unwillingness to clean himself is the playwright’s overt attention to the misguided idea of Masculine Primitive. His speech on what it takes to be a man motivates other workers who refuse to heed Yank’s coworker Long’s complaint that they were slaves in the hands of the capitalist owners such as Mildred. Long even rebels by telling that they were all once born free but are now slaves of the owners of the steel plants who has “dragged us down’til we’re on’y wage slaves in the bowels of a bloody ship, sweatin’, burnin’ up, eatin’ coal dust!” (Sc I). Celebrating the “bowels” of the ship is Yank’s acceptance of animal life. Yank acts the way he does because he chooses to do so, but, he is after all the playwright’s creation who writes Yank as a carnival performer. Yank’s aversion towards bathing or his shabby appearance from the coal dust gives him a sense of belonging; a sense which tries to normalize the dehumanizing working condition. Yank’s performance is aimed at evoking laughter from the proletariats who contributed towards bettering their working condition.

The stokehole workers stooping low to shovel coal imitate a “Neanderthal” man. The resemblance of the workers with our primitive family brings the issue of Social Darwinism which this play also tries to subvert. After the First World War average global citizens were flung into alienation which led them to question their identity. The world had not seen a war to this potential. After the war ended England was financially devastated whereas America’s contribution to the war made it achieve global significance. This also



meant the rise of Capitalism in America by promoting the “American Dream”. Although capitalism was present from the start of the 19th century, by the early 20th century the working class could see through the hypocrisy of the Capitalists. The playwright satirizes this shallowness of the upper class or capitalists who threw the working community into believing an elusive idea of progress such as the American Dream for their profit. The people in power had powers enough to determine how much power could be given in the hands of the working class, therefore the idea of belonging or progress under the banner of the American Dream was a false promise. Mildred for example is the daughter of “the president of Nazareth Steel, chairman of the board of directors” of the liner of the play. She is a student of sociology and therefore feels that her duty towards the community is to serve them through her social work. However, her aunt correctly mentions that her work only makes the poor feel poorer. She is a staple character in the carnival against whom a carnival is performed. Yank’s excessive want to belong criticizes the pretense of possibility to improve the standard of living of the working class and the failure to do so is the moment of truth that modern man suffered categorical alienation and fragmentation at the cost of Capitalism’s progress. Mildred’s presence in the stokehole in a milk-white dress is not only an odd choice but shows a lack of knowledge about life and the environment at the stokehole. Her opinion that Yank is a “filthy beast” is racist. She chooses a white dress which is contrasted to coal smeared bodies of the workers, especially Yank. They are both guided by the idea of Social Darwinism. For example, Mildred wants to meet the workers at the stokehole as a kind social gesture but humiliates Yank by calling him a “filthy beast”. Whereas Yank believes that he determines how the ship runs and that his physical prowess grants him by default the privilege to “belong” to a social group or climb up the hierarchy. Yank performs two characters simultaneously: one is Yank as the worker of the stokehole, the other as the performer of a carnival in the metaphoric costume of the “hairy ape”. His hairy costume is used as a method of protest against the working-class ideology of the primitive physical prowess to serve capitalism. His ape-like appearance also draws attention to Mildred’s wrong idea of the perfect human body. Ironically the uncouth coal-smeared bodies of the stokehole workers are, after all, a doing of the capitalists.

In the fourth scene, Long urges Yank to take the help of the government, law, and God to act against their unbearable working condition and racial discrimination. However, Yank’s ape-ness has not let him construct any belief or devotion in either the abstract God or the man made government. In scene five, Long tells Yank that he has brought him to Fifth Avenue so that he would realize that almost all people of the capitalist class or upper class were the same and Mildred was only a representative. Yank would be emancipated from his slave-like condition, recognizing his true place of belonging had he realized that the capitalist class compelled the workers to work in the bowels of the stokehole with meager wages under miserable conditions. Yank refuses to recognize the truth and this pushes him farther away from the class consciousness that Long intends to evoke. Eugene Kenneth Hanson has discussed the performance of O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* directed by Matthew Wilder. He writes that Yank seems to be in control except for his insecure personality. This Yank ‘tinks’, harangues and postures, but is easily thrown off-balance” (170) by both Mildred and a caged gorilla. Matthew Wilder modifies the direction of the play by altering the bathing scene in the opening of the fourth scene. In the original enactment of the play, we see all the stokehole workers have bathed themselves but their eyes hold on to the coal dust from work. The eyes embrace the mask-like “coal dust” that



sticks like a “black make-up, giving them a queer, sinister expression”. The playwright deliberately lets some of the coal remain so that the workers are never allowed to forget that they are in the end, only “stokehole” workers who work in the “bowels” of the ship.

According to O’Neill’s biographer, Louis Sheaffer, Eugene O’Neill was going through “a spiritual crisis, because of his mother” (qtd. in Robinson 95) particularly the remoteness in her behaviour which stemmed from her addiction to morphine. O’Neill’s parents were fairly irresponsible enough to shape his rebellion against the “bourgeois values and behavioral modes” (Robinson 97) but were conventional enough to put up an image of “a fairly conventional, respectable, middle-class family”. Social historians observe the emerging phenomenon called “Masculine Primitive” from the nineteenth century onwards that caused men to idealize man’s struggle against nature. This was of course supported by the idea of Social Darwinism and the masculine fear of rising feminist movements in America during the time which sought to evaluate men based on their physical strength and energy. According to Robinson, O’Neill associated with people from the lower class such as sailors or motorcycle gang members. His association with this class of people driven by Masculine Primitive might have influenced his character Yank who takes pride in his strength renders him to think that he is indispensable. Like his colleagues Long and Paddy, he is one of the victims of Capitalism, but Yank’s tragedy lies in the fact that he never realizes it. He keeps thinking of revenge for his humiliation but cannot achieve it because he refuses to be rational. Long and Yank even discuss their unfairly paid wages which shows how the capitalist class almost considers them to be apes and thus the low wage. Scene VII opens with the Industrial Workers of the World, an association consisting of workers like longshoremen and ironworkers who work to unite labourers against the capitalist class. IWW was originally formed in 1905. However during the 1910s and 1920s it saw a massive reduction in the number of members in their group which is partly attributed to their confrontation with the American Federation of Labour. Their radical anarchist stance of conducting strikes, lockdowns, and the First Red Scare after World War I compelled the American government to oppose growing communism along with radical political agitation, particularly among the working class. The Secretary at the IWW office tells Yank that he feels elated because a stokehole worker has come to the Wobblies representing the waking up of the stoker community against submissive Capitalism. On asking his name Yank answers after a moment of thinking that his name is Bob Smith. Yank has been called Yank for so long that he has almost forgotten his real name. His role of working as a stoker had unconsciously overtaken his real identity as a human being. His love of the stokehole and its coal dust is a maneuvered conditioning of the capitalist class. The capitalists employed labourers to work at a low wage in dehumanizing conditions and, during the process, convinced them that that is where they belonged. Yank, as we see, is not accepted by the IWW because he prefers physical strength represented by “dynamite” rather than intellect to protest against the capitalist class, thereby losing his opportunity of revenge.

Annalisa Brugnoli opines that Yank’s otherness is presented to the audience by constructing “onstage a sequence of masked or painted faces” that creates an opportunity to believe that Yank is after all different from a human being (43). She writes about Yank’s enactment of “visual narrative in the form of a moral parable”, which is done by O’Neill’s creation of a “nonverbal mythopoesis”. Yank’s mythical expression, attitude, or physical form naturally defies human expectation. The playwright creates a part-mythical, part-Neanderthal character by masking Yank to defamiliarize his audience. The uncanny



resemblance of Yank's wrong notion of belonging, otherization, and fragmentation eventually leading to loss of identity with the alienated working class of the age is indeed O'Neill's endeavor to write a moral parable. Yank's apelike glorification of his physical power, his inability to think, and his stubbornness to change is a masked portrayal of the true grief of the proletariats in America. The play is said to have attracted attention from the Federal Bureau of Investigation which declared that *The Hairy Ape* could easily be considered as radical propaganda (Gale) capable of provoking labour disputes and riots. *The Hairy Ape: A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life in Eight Scenes* read through Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque and grotesque body establishes the play as a performance of carnival and protest against the upper-class Americans in which Yank performs the alienated laboring class. The subtitle "A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life" suggests an ironic revival of primitive physical strength among the working class during the 1920s (Masculine Primitive). Mildred is the daughter of the owner of Nazareth Steel whose position doesn't directly depend on "physical strength" which had become so important to Yank that he lost his identity. Yank as an actor is performing the excess of the false values of the modern age, so his body is deliberately imagined like a Neanderthal man with excessive hair. The greatest gift of man's evolution would be the faculty of intelligence but Yank lacks it completely. His inclination is largely towards strength like an animal's instinct. O'Neill exhibits Yank's character akin to an ape to draw attention to the wrong ideology which was shaping the minds of the working class after the First World War. As Yank thinks him to be similar to the gorilla in the cage, his death proves that his assumption was wrong. The fragmentation of his identity occurs when his unconscious belief that he is strong as an ape collides with Mildred's opinion that he is a "filthy beast". Had he been similar to an ape the playwright would have shown a different ending. The fact that Yank refuses to accept Long or Paddy's complaint about their miserable working condition and low wages results from a wrong sense of belonging that spread after the industrial revolution. On the other hand, Long or Paddy's view that their position is miserable gives them a considerable opportunity to transcend the class hierarchy. Readers should realize that the play is not a tragedy of the estranged working class but a satiric attack on those ready to work at cheap low wages like animals without protest.

Mask is one of the essential props in a carnival. Carnival performs itself as a social commentary, and the performers use mask as a prop sometimes to conceal their identity and sometimes to embody the otherness that their mask stands for. Bakhtin notes that in a carnival "man's relation to man is elaborated" (qtd. in Bakhtin x) in which Pomorska finds that "One of the essential aspects of this relation is the "unmasking" and disclosing of the unvarnished truth under the veil of false claims and arbitrary ranks." (x). In Eugene O'Neill's works, masks similarly show how characters change through their use and abuse. Yank's coaled face or Mildred's white dress reveals the "false claims and arbitrary ranks" in pre-post war America. O'Neill's masks are social creations of the modern age, worn by the characters in his plays. They wear masks to comment on the inner workings of the modern man in the age of industrialization and mechanization such as in *The Hairy Ape*. *The Great God Brown*, the notes of which O'Neill began to write in the same year as *The Hairy Ape* includes "Play of masks – removable – the man who really is and the mask he wears before the world" (qtd. in Floyd) that makes O'Neill's obsession with masks and their use to critically comment on social issues pretty obvious. The "procession of gaudy marionettes" in scene V was masked in the 1922 enactment of the play by the



Provinciantown Players (Brugnoli 47). The purpose of masking characters would also be to unmask the reality of the masked characters, thereby fulfilling the goal of performing a carnival. Brugnoli writes that “the price of ‘belonging,’ namely of conforming to a pattern of self-identity that is inevitably self-referential, is the necessity to be forever the same.” (47). *The Hairy Ape* depicts an unnatural repetition of class expectation. In the play, the aristocrats are white and filthy-rich and instead, the stokers are black and filthy beasts. Yank puts on a mask that society creates for him. When he dies, he is unmasked. When unmasked, he is a human who is misguided because of a tainted sense of belonging. The title of the play “The Hairy Ape” likewise, hints at Yank’s identity as an ape which is sowed in his mind by his employers. Eugene O’Neill’s intention to read the “psychological insight into human cause and effect” was not limited to the characters of his play but also towards his audience that would reveal a pinch of the Jungian “collective unconscious” (Tornqvist 23). His motif to read through the collective conscious of his audience partly justifies why his plays are expressionistic. Plays like *The Hairy Ape*, *The Great God Brown*, or *Desire Under the Elms* are part of expressionist theatre consisting of characters mostly performing revolution against anarchist power. Likewise, the carnivalesque characters in *The Hairy Ape* enact a carnival whose spectatorship was meant to turn the working class rebellious against the capitalist class and humiliate the upper class. That is why the FBI opined that the play is capable of being part-radical propaganda. Brugnoli’s hypothesis that Yank’s temperament is mythical comes from the fact that he is a hybrid formed between a human being and a Neanderthal man. He covers his face with black to imitate an ape. Yank is a human being, but his work has compelled him to put on a mask of an ape. The Capitalists, on the other hand, smear white on their faces which Yank describes as ghastly evoking “relentless horror of Franksteins” and sometimes looking like “A procession of gaudy marionettes” on the streets of Fifth Avenue. The contrast between the white and the black and its artificial application is a part of the character’s costumes. These artificialities propagate a sense of exaggeration which is necessary for a carnival’s costume. This exaggeration helps to parody-fy extremities, both in power and margin. Mildred represents power whereas Yank represents the marginalized. Their bodies stand out through their costumes and masks. Yank’s animality is portrayed exaggeratedly through his blackened face which he chooses not to wash and Mildred’s superficiality is portrayed exaggeratedly through her stubbornness to wear the white dress while visiting the stokehole. Their unnatural obsession with the choice of color represents a mask that is a costume of a carnival. Yank’s failure to identify his dehumanized condition criticizes the drop in the number of IWW members during the early 20th century due to government crackdown.

Laughter, as Bakhtin found, was the least devoted place in literature, and even though people laughed, it was “distorted” by the “framework of bourgeois modern culture and aesthetics” (4). *The Hairy Ape* in this context rejects bourgeois aesthetics and values. When the audience laughs at Yank for losing his chance to emancipate, the audience overthrows capitalism’s dictatorship. Bakhtin goes on to write that “The most powerful enemy experiences terror at the sight of this satirical mask” (38), and we understand why an enemy who is the signifier of power against whom a carnival is performed would be scared against the very same mask. The mask is a “peculiar interrelation of reality and image” that asks for “transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames” (40). This is why Yank wears a mask of a stokehole worker who refuses to wash his eyes off the coal. He imitates an ape to become Eugene



O'Neill's "mythopoesis". The mask holds on to a "peculiar atmosphere and is seen as a particle of some other world. The mask never becomes just an object among other objects"; so Yank shall neither be considered an ape nor a human being. His mask is the part of the performance that reminds the audience of the moral parable underlying the play's plot. Just like medieval seriousness, American modernism embraced "elements of fear, weakness, humility, submission, falsehood, hypocrisy, or on the other hand with violence, intimidation, threats, prohibitions" (94), and to laugh at power is to reject power's authority and sternness. Bakhtin writes that sometimes seriousness or sternness (power) itself wears the mask of hypocrisy. For example, Mildred wants to serve the poor but is indifferent to their abysmal working condition. She also racially discriminates against Yank based on his appearance, and her audacity derives from her privilege. Man is not born a marionette (Mildred) but becomes one, just like man is not born an ape (Yank) but becomes one. That *The Hairy Ape* is a comedy demands from the audience laughter; a burst of laughter which would emancipate the otherized working-class spectators from the exploitation of the capitalists. Laughter is a consciousness of freedom and seriousness is unconscious servitude. Bakhtin writes "the drama of laughter presenting at the same time the death of the old and the birth of the new world" where all images are a "contradictory world of becoming" (149). *The Hairy Ape* is itself a drama of laughter asking to break old forms of authority and make new worlds of becoming, an idea that demands constant flux. Laughter in a carnival does the work of changing the historic authoritative power, which is understood best through the process of "becoming". Yank's obsession to "belong" hinders the mobility of "becoming" and therefore, refutes the possibility of a "new world" in which he will not be marginalized by the capitalist class anymore. Yank is otherized and remains so till the end of the play. His death in the gorilla cage symbolizes the never-ending imprisonment of the working class in the hands of power and an end to the fight of stokehole workers' demand of justified working conditions and wages.

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