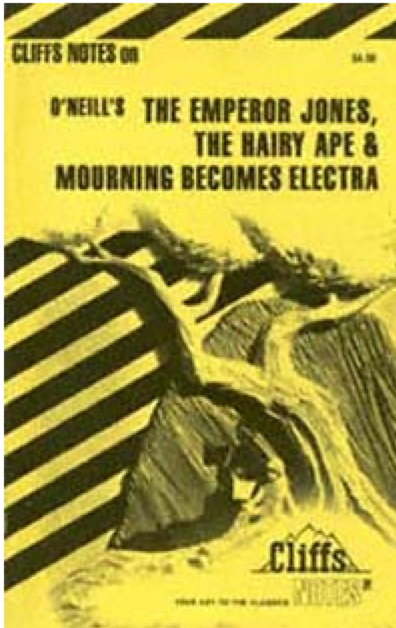



---


| | |
|---|---|
| **title:** | The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape & Mourning Becomes Electra : Notes, Including O'Neill's Life and Background, Brief Synopses, Scene-by-scene Summaries and Commentaries, Character Analyses, Critical Notes, Questions for Review, Selected Bibliography |
| **author:** | Clark, Peter.; Roberts, James Lamar |
| **publisher:** | John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (US) |
| **isbn10 \| asin:** | |
| **print isbn13:** | 9780822009108 |
| **ebook isbn13:** | 9780764513183 |
| **language:** | English |
| **subject** | O'Neill, Eugene,--1888-1953.--Emperor Jones, O'Neill, Eugene,--1888-1953.--Hairy ape, O'Neill, Eugene,--1888-1953.--Mourning becomes Electra. |

**publication date:** 1966
**lcc:**
**ddc:** 812.09
**subject:** O'Neill, Eugene,--1888-1953.--Emperor Jones, O'Neill, Eugene,--1888-1953.--Hairy ape, O'Neill, Eugene,--1888-1953.--Mourning becomes Electra.

## A NOTE TO THE READER

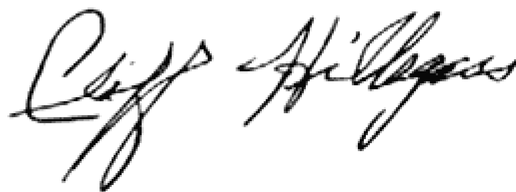
> THESE NOTES ARE NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE TEXT ITSELF OR FOR THE CLASSROOM DISCUSSION OF THE TEXT, AND STUDENTS WHO ATTEMPT TO USE THEM IN THIS WAY ARE DENYING THEMSELVES THE VERY EDUCATION THAT THEY ARE PRESUMABLY GIVING THEIR MOST VITAL YEARS TO ACHIEVE.

These Notes present a clear discussion of the action and thought of the work under consideration and a concise interpretation of its artistic merits and its significance.

They are intended as a supplementary aid to serious students, freeing them from interminable and distracting note-taking in class. Students may then listen intelligently to what the instructor is saying, and to the class discussion, making selective notes, secure in the knowledge that they have a basic understanding of the work. The Notes are also helpful in preparing for an examination, eliminating the burden of trying to reread the full text under pressure and sorting through class notes to find that which is of central importance.

These critical evaluations have been prepared by experts who have had many years of experience in teaching the works or who have special knowledge of the texts. They are not, however, incontrovertible. No literary judgments are. There are many interpretations of any great work of literature, and even conflicting views have value for students and teachers, since the aim is not for students to accept unquestioningly any one interpretation, but to make their own. The goal of education is not the unquestioning acceptance of any single interpretation, but the development of an individual's critical abilities.

The experience of millions of students over many years has shown that Notes such as these are a valuable educational tool and, properly used, can contribute materially to the great end of literature (to which, by the way, the teaching of literature is itself only a subsidiary) — that is, to the heightening of perception and awareness, the extending of sympathy, and the attainment of maturity by living, in Socrates' famous phrase, "the examined life."



# The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape & Mourning Becomes Electra

## Notes

by
Peter Clark, Ph.D.
Department of English
Newark College of Engineering
and
James L. Roberts, Ph.D.
Department of English
University of Nebraska

including

O'Neill's Life and Background

Brief Synopses

Scene-by-Scene Summaries and Commentaries

Character Analyses

Critical Notes

Questions for Review

Selected Bibliography

INCORPORATED
LINCOLN, NEBRASKA 68501

Editor

Gary Carey, M.A.
University of Colorado

Consulting Editor

James L. Roberts, Ph.D.
Department of English
University of Nebraska

ISBN 0-8220-0910-2
© Copyright 1966
by
Cliffs Notes, Inc.
All Rights Reserved
Printed in U.S.A.

1995 Printing

The Cliffs Notes logo, the names "Cliffs" and "Cliffs Notes," and the black and yellow diagonal-stripe cover design are all registered trademarks belonging to Cliffs Notes, Inc., and may not be used in whole or in part without written permission.

Cliffs Notes, Inc.   Lincoln, Nebraska

# CONTENTS

O'Neill's Life and Background 5

Naturalism 6

Expressionism 7

*The Emperor Jones*

List of Characters 9

A Brief Synopsis 9

Summaries and Commentaries 10

A General Evaluation 23

Questions for Review 26

*The Hairy Ape*

List of Characters 27

A Brief Synopsis 27

Summaries and Commentaries 28

A General Evaluation 52

Questions for Review 57

*Mourning Becomes Electra*

List of Characters 58

A Brief Synopsis 59

Summaries and Commentaries 61

Character Analyses 96

Naturalism 102

The Greek Myth 103

O'Neill's Use of the Greek Myth 106

Questions for Review 108

Selected Bibliography 109

# O'NEILL'S LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born in New York City October 16, 1888. O'Neill's father, James, was a matinee idol of the melodrama school who specialized in portraying the count of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Together with his family James O'Neill toured the entire country for sixteen years in this production. Baptized into the theater in this manner, Eugene utilized the technological background in becoming America's pioneer of expressionistic and naturalistic drama.

O'Neill entered Princeton University in 1906, but left shortly thereafter to work on a tramp steamer at sea. During this period of travel, O'Neill formulated many of the ideas and characterizations which are found in his works. His obsession with the mystical attractiveness of the sea plays a central role in the *S.S. Glencairn* tetralogy and in *Anna Christie*. It was not until O'Neill was stricken with tuberculosis in 1913, however, that his thoughts turned to playwriting. The following year he studied the art of playwriting under George Pierce Baker at Harvard University. In 1916 *Bound East for Cardiff* was produced at the Wharf Theatre in Massachusetts by the Provincetown Players.

Four years later, O'Neill was on Broadway with the Provincetown production of *Beyond the Horizon*, for which he received both popular acclaim and the Pulitzer Prize. In the course of his profuse dramatic career (47 plays) O'Neill was the recipient of three more Pultitzer Prizes (*Anna Christie,* 1922; *Strange Interlude,* 1928; and *Long Day's Journey Into Night,*

posthumously) and the coveted Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936. *Desire Under the Elms,* perhaps the greatest of his works, represents a milestone in American Drama.

Shortly before he died of bronchial pneumonia in 1953, O'Neill set out to destroy all of his remaining manuscripts. Fortunately for the world of the theather, three completed plays were uncovered among his papers: *Long Day's Journey Into Night: Hughie:* and *A Touch of the Poet*.

O'Neill's dramatic instincts repelled him against the old naturalism of surface-reality; he wanted a supra-naturalism. He favored the Strindberg of *The Spook Sonata* and *The Dream Play*, for there the Swedish expressionist concerns himself with the inscrutable forces behind life. Nietzsche's ideas on the development of race instincts also found a voice in the naturalism of O'Neill. O'Neill felt that man today is the same creature he was 2,000 years ago; he is learning ever so slowly how to control his primal instincts. Indeed, O'Neill would say that modern man is far worse off than his predecessors, for today we find the death of the old god and the failure of science to replace a new one. O'Neill, in dramatizing these instinctive relationships among men, made great use of Freudian and Jungian psychology. The drama of O'Neill is distinctively modern in all its aspects: in theatricality, in philosophy, and in subject matter.

## NATURALISM

O'Neill was one of the most famous exponents of a way of writing called "naturalism." This involved both a technique and a way of viewing life. Essentially, the literary concept of naturalism grew out of the concept of realism during the nineteenth century. The realist had wanted to "hold up a mirror to life" and render a very accurate picture of life. The naturalist wanted to go a step further and examine life as would a scientist. Thus the technique of the naturalist involves viewing life with scientific objectivity.

For the naturalist, man is controlled by basic urges and can do

very little to determine his own destiny. Forces of environment, heredity, and biological instinct combine to control man's life. These basic and elemental urges place man in a position similar to that of animals. But O'Neill also accepted the psychological urges as a part of man's basic driving force.

In his plays, O'Neill shows characters being driven by forces which they cannot understand or conquer. A man born in one type of environment is influenced accordingly, to a point where his basic actions in life are governed by these environmental forces. Carried

to an extreme, this view leads to determinism, that is, the idea that man can do nothing for himself and is constantly at the mercy of forces outside himself. A typical image used by the naturalist is that of person being trapped or being in a cage. In his earlier works, O'Neill often used the physical image of the cage (as in *The Hairy Ape*) to suggest the position of man caught or trapped in an alien and hostile universe.

In such a play as *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill depicts man as the victim of his elemental drives, which are motivated by the environment, the biological need to survive, and the hereditary traits of the characters. Later, O'Neill accepted the findings of Sigmund Freud and utilized psychological forces as a part of man's inherent drives. Thus, in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill attempts to show how certain characters are dominated by their sexual drives, which cause them to commit crimes that repulse the ordinary person. In these plays, man becomes a victim of forces beyond his control whether these forces are environmental, psychological, or biological.

Naturalism as a dramatic form has some serious limitations. In the true sense of tragedy, where man has the potential to control his destiny, the character becomes tragic in relation to how much he is in control of his fate. But in naturalism, man is incapable of controlling his destiny and so becomes the victim of greater forces.

The tragedy occurs when we consider the implications of these outside forces and the realization that man is trapped. Thus, with a horrified sense of pathos, we watch man struggling against insurmountable obstacles. Consequently, the tragedy lies in man's

awareness and in his consciousness of the futility of struggling against a blind fate.

## EXPRESSIONISM

Expressionism is a theatrical technique in which the dramatist suggests symbolically through his staging and his settings certain inner feelings of his characters or his subject matter. The

expressionistic dramatists were more interested in conveying their ideas than in giving a true representation of reality. In fact, this form is often a distortion of reality in order to present intimations of certain psychological states of mind. Expressionism uses symbols and symbolism in portraying crude violence and emotional intensity. Often there is a rejection of the strong individualistic character in favor of the more abstract symbol. There is seldom an interest in cause and effect because the dramatist wants to convey his ideas through abstractions.

In staging an expressionistic drama, there would be very little scenery and what is used would be there only to suggest something in the mind of the viewer. Thus, in *The Hairy Ape*, the prison would be depicted as a small cage to convey certain thematic significance to the viewer. In *Emperor Jones*, there is the appearance of the various apparitions which symbolize aspects of Jones' earlier life and his basic nature. These apparitions are symbolic of the basic fears found in all men and specifically of certain fears characteristic of only Jones.

In *The Hairy Ape*, Yank is not so much a character as he is a symbolic representation of a type of man who cannot belong in this modern world. He embodies a type rather than an individuality. The people who appear in the Fifth Avenue scene are described as manikins, and they walk with a stiff non-human carriage.

Again in *Emperor Jones*, the descent back to the aboriginal is not so much realistic as it is symbolic. The various forms which appear suggest something about all of mankind and are not meant just as individual fears for Jones alone.

Expressionism, therefore, is a technique which enables the dramatists to convey certain ideas without regard to reality. It emphasizes the inner conflicts of man and man's struggle with forces which would not be apparent in the everyday world.

# THE EMPEROR JONES

## List of Characters

Brutus Jones
An American Negro who escaped from prison and forced the natives of a West Indies island to make him emperor.

Henry Smithers
A white trader who has observed Jones' phenomenal rise to power.

Lem
The native chief who organizes the natives against Jones.

The Apparitions
*The Formless Fears*those basic fears which appear to every man.

*Jeff*the Negro whom Jones killed in a dice game.

*The Prison Guard*the white man whom Jones killed while escaping from prison.

*The Auctioneer and Planter*represents a part of Jones' heritage.

*The Slaves*represent further regression into Jones' past.

*The Witch Doctor*the most primitive image to appear to Jones.

## Brief Synopsis

Brutus Jones escaped from prison and arrived at an island in the West Indies, where he tricked all the natives into believing that he could not be killed. He then announced himself to be the emperor

and proceeded to cheat the natives out of an immense amount of wealth. At the opening of the drama, the natives have all disappeared and Jones hears the beginning of some distant drumbeats.

He knows immediately that his game is finished, but he has made preparations for this day by hiding food and provisions along an escape path. He leaves without hesitation. He feels he can escape easily, since he has convinced the natives that he can be killed only with a silver bullet.

When Jones reaches the great forest through which he must travel, he cannot find his food. He becomes frantic and, as he is searching, some "nameless, formless fears" creep out of the forest. He must shoot one of his six bullets to dispel these fears. Next in the forest, he hears someone shooting dice and sees the Negro Jeff, whom he had once killed in a crap game. He fires another bullet, thinking that he has to kill Jeff again. Later, he meets a chain gang and he recognizes the white guard he killed when he escaped from the prison. He must kill the guard again with another bullet.

In another part of the forest, Jones stops to rest and notices a group of planters dressed in the fashion popular during the nineteenth century. Suddenly, Jones finds himself on the auction block and must use two bullets to kill the auctioneer and the planter. Following this episode, he sees himself as one of a group of Negro slaves in the bottom of a slave ship. Next he finds himself in the deepest jungles, where a witch doctor is calling to him to become a sacrificial victim. Jones then kills the witch doctor with his last bullet, a silver bullet.

In the final scene, the natives come to the clearing of the forest looking for Jones. They enter the opening and kill him, using a silver bullet that they had spent the night making.

## Summaries and Commentaries

### Scene One

*Summary*

A Cockney trader approaches the chamber room in a palace in the West Indies and notices a Negro woman slipping away. He

stops her and wants to know where the rest of the people are. She explains that they have all gone. Smithers, the trader, realizes that the Negroes are revolting against the Emperor Jones. Smithers then awakens the emperor and asks him if he hasn't noticed something funny. Jones thinks that they are all hiding and slacking off from their work.

Jones explains how he arrived on the island as a stowaway two years ago and has since become the emperor over a group of "bush niggers," from whom he has extracted quite a bit of money, placing it in a bank in a neighboring state. He tells how he played upon the superstition of these ignorant natives and convinced them that he can never be killed by anything except a silver bullet. He shows Smithers a silver bullet he has made for himself and indicates that he knows that this job as emperor won't last much longer. But he has already made plans for when it will end. He has placed the money in a distant bank, has hidden food in the great forest, and has investigated all the paths and exits in the forest.

Smithers questions Jones about the rumored crimes Jones committed in the States, and Jones explains that perhaps he did have to kill another Negro in a crap game and maybe he did kill a prison guard, but the past is unimportant now that he is the emperor. Suddenly in the distance, some drums begin to beat. Then Smithers tells Jones that there are no servants anywhere in the palace and, furthermore, everyone has gone off to conjure spells against the Emperor Jones. They will be starting after him soon. Jones, however, is not frightened. He reminds Smithers that these Negroes are ignorant and that they are still frightened

of the "invincible" emperor. But he knows the game is up and resigns his job as emperor immediately. Smithers wonders what will happen if the natives catch him. Jones is not worried because he does have his silver bullet which he will use to kill himself rather than be captured. As he leaves, Smithers admires Jones but still hopes that the natives will capture him.

*Commentary*

Of the eight scenes in the drama this is the only one which does not take place in the great forest. The play opens in the palace, where

we see the emperor in all of his past glory. From this glory, we will gradually observe his descent downward to that of the aboriginal man.

A series of contrasts are suggested by this first scene. The whitewashed walls, the afternoon sun, and the general brightness of this setting will contrast effectively with the forest at night in all its darkness and superstition. And ironically, Brutus Jones has risen to his position by playing with the superstition of the natives and will later be destroyed by his own superstitions playing against him. In other words, Jones used superstition to gain control over the natives, and he will later succumb to his own innate superstitions, which will be invoked as a result of the natives playing the drums constantly.

Another contrast suggested by this scene is that caused by the utter quietness of the scene as opposed to the constant beating of the drums later on. The palace is deserted and there is no noise of any type until the drum begins to beat. But in subsequent scenes, there will be the constant sounds of drums and other sounds of the forest.

A further contrast is seen between the character of Jones and Smithers. O'Neill reverses the stereotype of the shiftless and unambitious Negro and makes Smithers, the white trader, a shiftless and lazy individual and allows Jones to be the energetic driving force.

The basic nature of Jones is established in this first scene so that the audience can observe his descent. Consequently, we observe that Jones possesses a shrewdness by the manner in which he

was able to gain control over the natives in such a short time. He has utilized his superior knowledge, for his ethics are those of the white American. In one sense, he is the embodiment of American ambition, whereas the natives are simple and easily deceived people. Aside from his shrewdness and superiority, we also see that Jones is an extreme realist. There is nothing of the idealistic about him. He realizes completely that his role as emperor is only temporary, and we find out that he has made all the necessary provisions for stepping down or escape.

We may thus say that this first scene provides the reader with all the necessary exposition for later actions in the drama. Along with the revelation of Jones' established plan to escape when the game is up, we are given an exposition of his past life which will be the subject matter of later scenes. We learn about Jones' murder of Jeff in a crap game and about his killing the prison guard and then escaping. Both Jeff and the prison guard will appear in later scenes. It is, therefore, against the knowledge and exposition of this first scene that the remainder of the drama will be enacted.

Finally, Jones is not just an ordinary protagonist. The closing part of the scene emphasizes his instantaneous action as he decides to give up his job as emperor and flee immediately. This strength of character makes him more important in view of the fact that we will see a strongly determined man throughout the rest of the play.

From the theatrical view, the drumbeat which begins for the first time in this scene and continues throughout the drama is tremendously effective. The audience is brought closer to the action by the use of this technique, and the drumbeat offers a strong unifying device. Note, furthermore, that it begins with the rate of the heartbeat and will become increasingly faster throughout the scenes. Theoretically, O'Neill thought that the audience's heartbeat should increase with the pace of the drumbeat.

## Scene Two

### *Summary*

At evening Jones has just reached the edge of the forest. There are yet a few small rays of light on the plains, but the great forest is a "wall of darkness." As soon as Jones reaches the forest, he throws himself down on the ground completely exhausted.

Jones is relieved to reach this point but suddenly realizes that "Dat soft Emperor job" has not left him in good physical shape for such strenuous exercise. The drums are also beginning to bother him somewhat. He thinks things will be better as soon as he finds the food he has hidden and eats it. He removes the rock he hid the food under, but it is not there. He then frantically moves several

other rocks but is unable to find the rations. Fear of being lost comes over him, and he instinctively lights a match. Immediately, he fears that the others will see the match and he is annoyed at himself.

From out of the blackness of the forest "the LITTLE FORMLESS FEARS creep out from the deeper blackness." At first Jones does not see them because he is still looking up at the forest, but then he becomes aware of them and takes his pistol and fires at them. Immediately they disappear, but Jones knows that the natives were certain to hear the pistol shot. Gathering up his courage, he plunges into the darkness of the forest.

*Commentary*

There is a tremendous contrast between this scene and the first one. The forest is seen as a wall of darkness in contrast to the brightness which dominated the opening scene. The time now is the beginning of the night; symbolically, Jones' descent back to a primitive existence begins with the first darkness. Thus, the beginning of darkness is equated with the beginning of his reversion to the aboriginal state.

There is one vague similarity between the first two scenes; that is, the giant trees resemble the pillars of the palace. This is an ironic similarity, since these trees will cause the destruction of what Jones accumulated in the palace.

Jones' need for food and the frantic search he makes to find it is the initial sign that he is descending the evolutionary ladder. That the food is lost is also our first hint that Jones' plans were not as carefully laid as we were earlier led to believe. Note that it is

when Jones is frantic about the food and that when his first fear about being lost is troubling him that the LITTLE FORMLESS FEARS creep out of the forest. These fears, however, are not the Negro's particular fears, but instead, they are the fears that every person of the civilized world possesses. The first fears are not primitive but are present everywhere and they must appear first before Jones can later relate to particular episodes concerning the Negro race.

In the middle of this scene, Jones lights a match to search for food. This is the first sign that he has lost some of his control. But he realizes immediately the foolishness of this act, that the light will show the natives his exact position. At the end of the scene he fires his first pistol shot. Again, Jones realizes that it was a foolish thing to do. Jones still has enough rationality at the beginning to comprehend that these acts were foolish and dangerous. Later, he will not be concerned with the rationality of his acts and will only want to destroy the "ha'nts" which appear to him.

Scene Three

*Summary*

Inside the forest, the moon has risen, casting an eerie glow through the thick canopy of leaves. At first, nothing can be seen and the audience can hear only the beating of the tom-tom. As the scene becomes more visible, the figure of Jeff can be seen "crouching on his haunches." He is rolling a pair of dice, and his movement is that of an automaton.

Jones is pleased that the moon has risen and he wonders about the time, but dares not strike a match to find out. He now thinks that there is nothing majestic about the ex-emperor. He begins to whistle, but stops himself and listens to the drum, which is beginning to unnerve him. Suddenly, he hears a "queer clickety sound," and thinks it sounds "like some nigger was shootin' craps." Looking around, he sees Jeff and his countenance gladdens. He talks to him as though the apparition were a living man. He is glad that Jeff didn't die from the razor cut, but Jones

suddenly reverses himself and wonders why Jeff is in the forest. He then realizes that it is a "ha'nt." He takes out his pistol and has to kill Jeff a second time. As soon as he fires, the apparition fades away, and Jones listens to the sounds of the tom-tom, and thinks that the natives are getting closer. He immediately flees into another part of the forest.

*Commentary*

The appearance of the moon suggests the passing of time, but also causes an eerie effect in the forest. Against the moonlight every-

thing seems distorted and weird. Thus, the forest (now and later) will take on varying and shifting emphasis as Jones' mind becomes more and more primitive.

At the beginning of the scene, Jones is still quite rational. He refuses to light a match to check on the time because he knows that the light will expose his position.

Notice the appearance of Jeff. He moves as though he were an automaton, suggesting something of his nature. Furthermore, his movements are those of a character found in an expressionistic dramathe movement is used not to suggest reality, which would be out of keeping here, but instead, to suggest the vague quality connected with Jeff as a symbol of something from Jones' past.

If the play is regressing through certain events in Jones' life and through certain events in the history of the Negro race, we must account for the fact that the appearance of Jeff comes before that of the prison guard, which in actuality is a reversal of the actual time sequence. O'Neill here is using the murder of Jeff as a more general crime which assumes for the Negro race less importance than a crime committed against the white authority represented by the prison guard. The murder of one man by another is not a crime connected with any particular race. In the same way that the little formless fears were not individualized for the Negro race, the murder here has no connotations connected with Jones' racial nature. A white murderer would be faced with the same apparition and the same superstition.

Like scene two, this episode also ends with a pistol shot. We know from the first scene that Jones has only five lead and one

silver bullet; thus, Jones' regression is represented partly by the number of bullets fired.

In the reading text, this scene is very short. On the stage it requires considerably more time for presentation because so much

of the importance must be translated onto the stage. In other words, the staging is equally as important as the dialogue.

Scene Four

*Summary*

In another part of the forest there should be the suggestion of a road running diagonally across the stage. When Jones appears, his emperor's uniform is beginning to look somewhat ragged. He drops down on the ground, exhausted from his running. As soon as he can catch his breath, he takes off the spurs from his boots because they are causing him to trip too often. He thinks that he can travel better without "dem frippety Emperor trappin's."

Jones feels that the forest is filled with all sorts of peculiar things at night and only hopes that no more "ha'nts" appear, but he immediately realizes that for a civilized man there are no such things as ghosts. He knows that he is just hungry and tired and that is why he thinks that his eyes see things.

Jones believes that the night is half gone, and he decides that he must rest for a while. While he is relaxing, a small gang of Negro convicts appear, followed by a white prison guard. When Jones sees them, he tries to flee but is "too numbed by fright to move." The Negroes stop, and the prison guard points his whip at Jones and "motions him to take his place among the other" prisoners. Jones dutifully obeys, mumbling that he is going to get even with the guard some day.

Jones shows all the gestures of working with a shovel. Suddenly the guard comes over toward him threateningly and lashes him

with a whip. As the guard turns his back, Jones lifts his imaginary shovel and tries to strike the guard but then realizes that he has no shovel. With terrified rage, he takes his gun and shoots point-blank at the guard, saying that he will kill him again. Instantly after the shot, the forest closes in and the figures disappear, and only the sound of the tom-tom is left.

*Commentary*

Jones' regression toward the aboriginal is represented more directly in this scene. His uniform is now becoming tattered and he removes the spurs, a vestige of civilization. Gradually, his clothes will be completely torn off of him. Furthermore, he takes off his coat and is thus seen stripped to the waist. This makes him appear more aptly dressed in assuming his role in the prison gang. If scenes three and four were in their normal chronological order, Jones would not be as regressed in terms of his clothes.

Gradually, Jones is coming to recognize the possibility of ghosts. In this scene, he hopes that he will not see them any more, but then reverses himself and tries to rationalize them away. He knows that ghosts do not exist, for a Baptist parson told him so a long time ago. But ironically, when Jones took over as the emperor, he put aside his old Baptist religion. Now in the forest he wants to renew it. But this will be the last scene in which Jones will try to convince himself rationally that there are no ghosts. After this, he will have regressed to a point where he will accept the presence of ghosts and will (from now on) only look for means of combating them.

Jones' descent can be most vividly seen by his reaction to the white prison guard. Remember that he has just taken off his emperor's garb and now stands naked to the waist. In contrast with the pride and arrogance he showed as emperor in the first scene, we now see him entirely subservient to the prison guard. From the proud talk in the first scene to his answer: "Yes, suh! Yes, suh! I'se comin'," we grasp the descent that has already occurred in Jones' mind.

This scene then represents the original conflict of the slaves and their masters. The scene emphasizes the position of the Negro in relationship with the white, and the irony is that Jones has rapidly descended from ruling emperor to subordinate convict under the domination of the white guard. He tries to kill the guard but he has no shovel. Thus, he takes out the pistol and kills the guard again. In mentioning that he must kill *again,* we see that Jones has now abandoned all thoughts about ghosts being unreal. The mind has

now regressed to a point where he completely accepts the reality of the ghost.

## Scene Five

*Summary*

In a large circular clearing, Jones appears with his clothes in tatters. He drags himself exhaustedly to a stump and sits down. He then prays, acknowledging that he did wrong in killing Jeff and the guard. He offers excuses but prays for forgiveness, and asks specifically that the "Lawd keep dem" ghosts away from him. He can handle real men, but he doesn't know what to do when he meets a ghost. He is also bothered by the beating of the drum, which is beginning "to sound ha'nted, too."

Jones' feet are hurting so badly that he decides to take off his shoes, feeling that he would be able to run better without them. While Jones is removing his shoes, a group of people begin to congregate around him. They are dressed like planters in the nineteenth century and the central figure is the auctioneer. After some actions among the group, the auctioneer motions to Jones to stand up on the stump. He screams and looks for a way to escape, but there is none.

The auctioneer points to Jones, and some of the planters begin bidding for him. Jones becomes frantic when he recognizes that he is being sold as a slave. He then determines to prove that he is a free Negro. He takes his gun and fires one shot at the auctioneer and another one at the planter. Then the figures disappear and Jones rushes off into the darkness.

*Commentary*

At the opening of the scene, Jones appears in tattered clothing. His physical condition represents the descent back to the primitive, so his appearance accords with the action of this particular scene; that is, he is dressed in a fashion similar to that of a slave just brought over from the African jungles.

For the first time, Jones tries a serious prayer. This behavior differs greatly from that of the independent and self-sufficient man we saw in the first scene. Here is a man almost broken by his experiences who is seeking help from any source. Furthermore, we should remember that Jones had forgotten his religion when he took over as emperor and had taken up the religion of the natives. Now we see that he tries to resort to his old reliance on religion, but the religion of the natives, as represented by the beating of the tomtom, is considerably stronger.

In the last scene, we saw Jones kill again the prison guard. We progress (or regress) straight from that crime to the auction block where the slave is being sold to a white buyer. Aside from the reversion, this juxtaposition of events suggests that the killing is related to the slave block, indicating a definite reversion in the human psyche.

From the strong individual of the opening scene, Jones has been reduced to a piece of property to be auctioned off. In one sense, enslavement was the most climactic event in the history of the Negro race, so Jones has to use two of his bullets in this scene, one for the auctioneer and one for the plantation owner.

The reader should be aware that at this point the tom-tom is beginning to sound louder and closer. Actually, we later learn that the natives were not chasing Jones, but the increased tempo of the tom-tom makes it sound as though they were getting closer.

Scene Six

*Summary*

In another clearing in the forest, somewhat smaller than the preceding ones, Jones is heard stumbling through the undergrowth. Jones appears and is concerned that he has only the silver bullet left, which he must save for good luck. He is also concerned about the increased darkness and his extreme weariness.

When he comes forward to rest, it is apparent that his clothes have been torn from him so that only his breech cloth is left.

Gradually other figures can be seen. They are sitting in a cramped position and are swaying to the rhythm of a ship. A low moan rising to a crescendo is heard from these figures until Jones becomes aware of them. He tries to hide his face and blot out their existence, but slowly, he becomes affected by the rhythmic swaying and joins the group. Then his voice becomes loudest in moaning and crying out in desolation. As the lights on stage fade, Jones can be heard scrambling off into the underbrush.

*Commentary*

The reader should be aware that the forest is gradually closing in on Jones. On the stage, this fact would be somewhat apparent as the acting space becomes smaller and smaller. Symbolically, this represents the restriction and closing in of life around Jones. Thus, in the next scene, the acting space will be only a few feet of space. Jones' additional regression is represented by the fact that his clothes have completely disappeared and he is only in his breech cloth. This is the same type of dress worn by the other Negro slaves in this scene, therefore making Jones closer to the Negroes who were brought over in the slave ships. Moreover, he begins for the first time to identify with the primitive Negro slave as he takes up the aboriginal chant with fervor.

Since there is this psychic identification, note that there is no pistol shot fired in this scene. Furthermore, this scene has the least amount of dialogue. The success of the scene depends almost entirely upon the director and the actor.

Scene Seven

*Summary*

Jones finds himself at the foot of a gigantic tree near a river. There is a rough structure which resembles an altar and he sinks before it, kneeling in a "devotional posture." He feels that he has seen this place before, or at least remembers something about it.

Suddenly a Congo witch doctor appears. He is adorned with all the primitive attire of his class. When Jones sees him, he is

almost paralyzed with fear and fascination. As the witch doctor begins to dance with a magical incantation and rhythm, Jones begins to follow the movement with the same sway until he is obviously hypnotized. As Jones follows the movement of the witch doctor, it becomes obvious that he is meant to be a sacrificial victim.

Jones then begins to moan unconsciously for mercy and starts to back away from the witch doctor. As he pleads "Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer," he remembers the one silver bullet left in his gun and fires it at the witch doctor.

*Commentary*

By the time of this scene, the actual acting space on the stage should be considerably reduced, representing Jones' more confined and primitive view of the world. Jones himself appears as though he is a sleepwalker, moving as in a trance. He has almost totally lost control of himself and is now the victim of the strange forces of terror which have been working against him all through the night.

Jones' recognition of the place suggests that he has indeed retrogressed through time until he has become a part of the aboriginal past. The scene does represent a place in the jungles of Africa, and Jones' strange sense of awareness aligns him directly with his African ancestry.

The appearance of the witch doctor is the final episode in Jones' life. This is primitive superstition carried back to its ultimate end. To destroy this apparition, Jones must use the silver bullet which he had made to frighten the superstitious natives and which he

was saving for himself. Consequently, his paradoxical reliance on superstition has now turned inward and destroyed him.

When the witch doctor appears, Jones sees himself in the role of some type of sacrificial victim. This is doubly ironic because in a literal sense Jones has been using the natives as a type of sacrificial victim, and because he now sees himself in connection with the most primitive of rites, that of sacrificing a human being to some unknown god.

## Scene Eight

### *Summary*

At dawn the native Lem appears at the edge of the forest with a small squad. They are accompanied by Smithers, who is disgusted that the natives have spent so much time beating the drums while Jones was obviously escaping. Lem, however, is confident that they have caught Jones.

There is a noise inside the forest and Lem signals for his men to enter quietly. There is a silence and then a shot, followed closely by sounds of "savage, exultant yells." The beating of the tom-tom then stops. Lem explains that they spent the night preparing a silver bullet with which to kill Jones. In a moment, the natives emerge carrying Jones' body, and Smithers has to admit that at least Jones dies in the height of style.

### *Commentary*

The beating of the tom-tom drum has apparently had its effect on Jones because he is killed at the exact same spot in the forest where he entered. The drums have performed their superstitious duty by confusing Jones and causing him to trap himself.

This final scene functions mainly to bring the drama to a close in an ironic fashion. Jones had indeed convinced the natives that he possessed strong charms. For they spent the night preparing a silver bullet for him, not chasing him the way he had thought. Thus Jones instilled a superstitious fear in the men, and they practiced that superstition in destroying him.

## General Evaluation

A Negro escapee from an American prison, Brutus Jones, has found refuge on a West Indian island. By stealthful trickery and conniving, he has deluded the native inhabitants into thinking of him as a god and has established himself as emperor of the isle. As the play opens, however, a revolt against him is being prepared, and

Jones decides to flee his adversaries. Deprived of horses, he enters the forest on foot and soon loses his direction. With the onset of nightfall, Jones is menaced by a series of apparitions; actually they are projections from his own frightened imagination. He dismisses each of them with a shot from his revolver. Finally, exhausted and half-crazed with fear, he collapses and is found and shot by the native pursuers.

Although the play moves on several levels, the symbolic superstructure never interferes with the basic dramatic problem: the escape and death of Jones. In using the name Brutus, O'Neill cleverly plays on the association with assassin. The "assassin" in this case, however, lies in Jones himself. It is his past, and not merely his physical and personal past, but the past of his entire race. And what is more significant, this racial heritage is not wholly distinct from the past of all mankind. The order of the apparitions is intended to symbolize this.

First we find the little black, shapeless fearsfears which exist in all men immediately beneath the layer of the conscious (civilized) intelligence, troubling, thwarting, and distorting the operations of the rational faculty. Ever present, these little shapeless fears are the raw material of all the other apparitions, for, under the pressure of Jones' frantic attempt to escape, the thin veneer of civilization quickly begins to crumble and disappear. Now these formless fears take on a very definite symbolic form.

In the following scenes Jones relives the murder of his friend, his life in a prison gang, and the slaying of the prison guard. Each new recollection finds him more frenzied and stripped of a little

more of the elaborate and ornate emperor's uniform (possibly representing civilization) with which he entered the forest.

In scene five, Jones recalls a past far older than his own. Crouching sheepishly on an auctioneer's block, he finds himself being bid for and sold. Infuriated at this imaginative throwback, he cries, "I show you I is a free nigger, damn yo' souls!" and fires two of his precious bullets into the night. (One gets the feeling that bullets and gunpowder are symbols of modern civilization.) No

matter how much Jones might voice his complete freedom, he is only technically free. In a wider context, he is not free at all, enveloped as he is by sundry, hopelessly complex ties with a racial past which has now reared up to claim its own, to claim Jones.

The last projected experience finds Jones reliving a past that unites the complicated, interlocking symbolism of the play into an organic whole. Just as Jones has, in the course of these regressions, come to represent the Negro race, so now the Negro race, in this final episode, comes to represent the entire human race. *Naked*, insane with fear, Jones listens to the beating of the tom-toms (like the ever-haunting primordial Furies), which grow louder and faster. He regresses to "very fear itself, the fear of the universe which lies in primitive religion." As the dance of the Congo witch doctor becomes more and more furious, Jones finds himself completely drawn into the hypnotic spirit of the gyrations.

However, the ritualistic salvation which he seeks can only be effected by his life-sacrifice to a primitive crocodile-god, an act which completes symbolically the cyclical return to primitive barbarism. Commitment to this act would permit Jones "to belong" on a level so elemental, so barbaric, as to end forever the search to belong. But this elemental identification is rejected by our "emperor," when he cries out "Lawd save me! Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer." He unleashes his silver bullet at the crocodile and thus shatters this primordial ritual.

This climactic scene contains some of the richest symbolism to be found in all of O'Neill's work. The apparently meaningless

outcry to "Lawd Jesus" resurrects in Jones some faint remembrance of an advancement beyond the sheer animal cries of the witch doctor. Recollection of this "progress" calls up a reserve of strength and power, even in this primordial instance, which is sufficient to provoke Jones to a triumphant gesture of rejection and defiance. Yet it is little more than a gesture, for when it is completed, Jones lies whimpering on the ground. The Furies of fear, the tom-toms, are not appeased, but only reduced to a "somber pulsation." But it is this very reduction which precipitates the tragic grandeur of Jones' death. He has risen for a brief instant above his race and his destiny.

And at that particular moment, the tom-toms are reduced to "a baffled but revengeful power."

## Questions for Review

1. Discuss O'Neill's use of symbolism in *Emperor Jones*.

2. How does *Emperor Jones* comply with the philosophy of naturalism?

3. Explain in terms of theme and staging how *Emperor Jones* is expressionistic?

4. To what extent is Brutus Jones a tragic figure?

5. Explain the function of each apparition.

6. How is Brutus Jones emblematic of all mankind?

7. Justify the order of the apparitions in *Emperor Jones*.

8. Compare and contrast Brutus Jones and Yank, in *The Hairy Ape*.

9. Discuss the unity of the play's structure.

10. *Emperor Jones* is nothing more than a "mood" piece. Agree or disagree?

11. How is *Emperor Jones* cyclical?

12. Discuss *Emperor Jones* as monodrama.

# THE HAIRY APE

## List of Characters

Yank
The "hairy" protagonist, a powerful stoker on a modern ocean liner, who believes that he plays a vital part in the evolutionary process.

Paddy
An old Irish stoker who sailed in days when the relationship between man and the sea was different. He represents the return to an established "past."

Long
Yank's contemporary and a discontended stoker who views the worker's plight in terms of a class conflict. He represents the possible "future," a type of Marxist socialism.

Mildred
The neurotic and insincere daughter of a steel magnate whose chance encounter with Yank precipitates the action of the drama. Her assumed poses are indicative of the general role-playing performed by the upper class.

The Aunt
Mildred's aunt, who functions mainly as a listener to Mildred.

Secretary
The obscure leader of the IWW who fails to comprehend Yank's

motives and has him brutally thrown out of the meeting hall.

## Brief Synopsis

Yank, a stoker on a steamship, feels that he belongs to the powerful world of steam, steel, and iron until he has an encounter in the

stokehole with a delicate, neurotic, rich woman who faints when she sees his strength and brutality. After this encounter, Yank begins to wonder if he does belong in the same world since he thinks the woman called him a "hairy ape."

On shore Yank begins a search to find out if he does belong to the present-day world. He goes with a shipmate to Fifth Avenue, where he observes the idle rich. When he insults some of the wealthy people, he is arrested and thrown in prison. Here he hears about an organization which is opposed to the wealthy class. When he is released, he offers his services to this organization, explaining that he wants to blow up all the steel and capitalistic enterprises. He is thrown out of the meeting hall of the organization.

He makes one final attempt to discover his essential nature by going to the zoo, where he talks with a gorilla. He frees the animal with the hope of joining him and finding a sense of belonging, but the gorilla kills Yank and throws his body into the cage. Yank dies there, wondering if he has finally found the place where he belongs.

## Summaries and Commentaries

### Scene One

*Summary*

In the cramped quarters of the firemen, the ceiling is so low that the men must walk with stooped shoulders. The men themselves are "hairy chested with long arms of tremendous power,"

suggesting something of the Neanderthal Man. The men are all talking at once, and there is a great uproar in the small, cramped compartment. Yank, who seems to be bigger than the others, demands the rest to "choke off dat noise." Paddy, an old Irishman, begins to sing a sentimental chanty, but Yank interrupts him and ridicules the sentimentality of the song, saying that they belong only in one place, and that is in this ship. Long, another seaman, agrees with Yank and tries to make the others see that their predicament is a result of the "damned Capitalist clarss." Yank rejects this idea and maintains

that they all belong with the fire and steel and that only through them does the ship continue to operate.

Paddy, the Irishman, reminisces over the time when the sailor's job was more closely connected to the natural elements. He remembers the work on the sailing ships when man worked under "the warm sun on the clean deck" and the work was filled with skill and daring. Now he feels "caged in by steel. . .like bloody apes in the Zoo!"

Yank spurns the past and sees himself as a new man of the engines and steel and smoke. For him, only the men who do the work really belong, and the othersthe rich people "dey don't belong."

When the bell rings for the men to report for their watch, Paddy thinks that he will not report, and Yank tells him that he does not belong with the new generation.

*Commentary*

In a play of this nature, the staging and the preliminary description are of symbolic importance. The first scene should give the impression of a constricted cage, suggesting that this type of man, or ultimately man in general regardless of his social nature, is caged in by some aspect of life or some aspect of his own nature. Even the sounds of the men are to suggest animal sounds rather than those of human beings in social contact. O'Neill describes the sounds as "the bewildered, furious, baffled defiance of a beast in a cage." Note also that the vocabulary of the men is closer to that of animals than to that of educated human beings.

The cage as a symbol became a popular device of suggesting many positions in the universe. It is not a new symbol with O'Neill, but serves his purpose here of suggesting the exact nature of these people. In his second paragraph, O'Neill suggests that "The treatment of this scene, or of any other scene in the play, should by no means be naturalistic." By this, O'Neill means that the place should suggest a cage or be an expression of a cage rather than being something that one would too easily recognize from our natural life. The

effect he is seeking is that of suggesting the men are "imprisoned" by the steel and the heavy construction of the ship and ultimately by life itself. The emphasis on steel gains further significance when we later learn that Mildred's wealth comes from steel, and she will be the cause of Yank's destruction. Thus Yank, who now looks upon steel as his ally, will later reverse himself and want to destroy all of it.

Since the ceiling is so low, the men must stoop in order to walk. This circumstance suggests further alliance with the ape or animal world. "The appearance of Neanderthal Man is guessed at." Furthermore, the men or actors would be hairy chested and built to suggest great physical power. This concept is important because, later, Yank will feel his sense of belonging only in a society which is built on brute force.

The description of Yank is likewise important. He is described as the most powerful animal there, "more sure of himself than the rest." In one sense he is the chief ape in this semi-steel zoo. Thus, in the opening description, O'Neill has suggested the entire meaning of his play.

O'Neill has also tried to capture the universality of the situation by "representing all the civilized races of the world." Note the varying types of accents in the first speech, but all of them blend in to make, generally, one incomprehensible noise. Therefore, in production of the play, each of these individual speeches will be lost in the general accumulation of accents and simple animal noises.

The play opens with singing and drinking. The song is an old

sailing song about "whiskey Johnny." Paddy, "an old, wizened Irishman," represents a nostalgic yearning for a past when man was closer to nature and could feel his worth as a human being. The song he sings is a sentimental chanty about the old life on the sea in which the human element played an important part. He describes the oneness and the essential sense of belonging that one had on the old sailing ship. "Brave men they was, and bold men surely." He sees the life in romantic terms: "We's be making sail in the dawn, with a fair breeze, singing a chanty song wid no care to it. . . ." He sees the

men of old as free men but today "I'm thinking 'tis only slaves do be giving heed to the day that's gone or the day to come." In the days of old, many "worked under the sky and 'twas work wid skill and daring to it." In other words, the past was a time when Paddy felt that he belonged, but now amid the coal smoke, amid the caged conditions, he has lost his sense of belonging. He can only find it by dreaming of the past and enduring the present. He contrasts the ways of the past with the present by the emphasis on the sun and character of the sailing ship as opposed to the smoke and steel of the new ships. He emphasizes that man of the past was skilled, and all the modern man needs is strength to throw in more coal.

Yank is the complete opposite to Paddy. He does not even like the song, and he tells Paddy that the sailing ship is dead and that Paddy is also dead. Yank insists that he now belongs to the sea, and he reacts to Paddy's sentimental longings by pointing out that home and the past only carry bad connotations. Yank emphasizes that the present relies upon power and force and brute strength. The modern ship, having its basis in steel and coal, needs a new type of man who can cope with this new force, and Yank sees himself as this ideal type. Thus, in conjunction with the steel and force, Yank's brute strength gives him a sense of belonging that Paddy does not have. As Yank says, he is the force that makes the engine move. The modern man has more power with which to work, and this gives him a higher position in the world. Being the cause of the power, he feels that he has a greater sense of belonging than Paddy because the modern world is based on power and strength and force. Yank represents everything connected with modern machinery: "I'm de muscles

in steel, de punch behind it. . . . We run de whole woiks." In other words, Yank considers himself as the basic or elemental force behind the industrial society. "I'm smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles." The entire modern world depends upon Yank's strength and force.

Thus, in this first scene, we see that Yank has a strong sense of belonging in this strong industrialized society of steel and coal. Unlike Paddy, he sees himself as a significant part of this world, and since the world is built on strength, Yank's tremendous strength blends in with this world. Yank feels that he is an integral part of progress and accepts his position as being of great importance.

It is ironic that both in a primitive society and in an industrial society, the physical strengththe strong shall dominateis emphasized as the most important attribute. In conclusion, in his own world, Yank feels secure and has a sense of belonging. O'Neill has then set up the machinery for Yank's security and sense of belonging to be destroyed. We should ultimately keep in mind his sense of his place in the world in connection with the final view of him in the cage in the zoo.

A final note about Yank is emphasized by the fact that he attempts to think. Once man attempts to go beyond brute force, he will realize that his sense of belonging is an illusion, a self-deception. Thus, Yank is set apart from the rest by the fact that he attempts to think, and finally, by this act, he will become destroyed by Mildred's accusations. The other men react to Yank's thinking by astonishment which is described in terms of a "brazen metallic quality," suggesting a phonograph record. Consequently, the other men who do not attempt to think will not be destroyed by Mildred.

In contrast to Paddy's view and to Yank's view is the socialist view expressed by Long. He is class-conscious, and through him we get a realistic sense of what is going on. He seems to represent the ideas found in the IWW. Long sees the society as a conflict between labor and capital. But Yank is not concerned with this. He cannot understand the dichotomy that the two classes pose and has no conception of class. He knows now that he is as important as the people on the deck because he makes the ship move. Yank is only concerned with his own position. Yank considers himself as the motive power of the ship, but

Long sees himself as a slave on the ship. Ultimately, Yank will not be able to develop any sense of class or conflict and will view all things in relation to himself. His final comment in the sense is to tell others, specifically Paddy, that "Yuh don't belong." Consequently, the scene ends on the emphasis of Yank's belonging.

In conclusion, Paddy escapes from the present situation by lamenting about the past and yearning for the values inherent in the past. Long is conscious of the dispossession brought about by this new situation and views it as a class struggle between labor and

capital. Yank is oblivious to any sense of discontentment and feels that he belongs in this new society simply by the fact that he is the strongest force making other forces go. He sees himself not as a tool, but as the cog in the wheel that makes the society run.

## Scene Two

### *Summary*

On the deck of the ship, Mildred Douglas is sitting with her aunt. Mildred is a rich woman who is fretful, "nervous and discontented, bored by her own anemia." Mildred attempts to say things which will shock her aunt, and openly tells her aunt how detestable she finds her. The aunt regards the girl as silly, especially since Mildred had spent time in the slums of the city, where, according to the aunt, Mildred succeeded in making the poor feel worse by seeing this rich woman there. Mildred retorts that she "would like to help them. I would like to be some use in the world." She reminds her aunt of the great wealth the family has accumulated through steel. But Mildred considers herself to be the waste product of so much energy which was used up by her ancestors, leaving her empty and barren.

Mildred is actually waiting for the second engineer to take her below in order that she may see how the firemen and stokers work. Her aunt is horrified, but Mildred reminds her that the grandfather of the steel millions began as a fireman.

When the engineer arrives, he suggests that Mildred change her white dress to something more appropriate. But Mildred explains that she has fifty just like this one, and she will throw it in the ocean if it gets spoiled.

As she is about to leave, the aunt accuses her of being insincere and a poser. After several such accusations, Mildred retaliates by slapping the aunt and then leaving with the engineer to visit the fireroom.

*Commentary*

In reading this play, one must always keep in mind the visual effects that can be achieved on the stage. The first scene took place in the forecastle. In contrast this scene takes place on the open deck of the ship. The first scene showed the lives of the stokers, and this scene reveals the barren and bored life of the idle rich. This development is projected against a "beautiful, vivid life of the sea all about." There should be in the stage setting a sense of life and vibrancy, of the beauty of the sea and the sky which will contrast with the artificiality of the bored rich who are sailing on the ship.

Mildred is dressed totally in white, which represents the "anemia" of her character and her lack of vitality. O'Neill writes that she looks "as if the vitality of her stock had been sapped before she was conceived." We get the impression that Mildred is similar to Yank in that both of them are alienated from nature and both are a result of what their particular society has made them.

In contrast to her white dress, Mildred considers the black smoke to be beautiful. Again this contrasts to the beauty of the sky and sea which the smudge infiltrates. Paddy had objected to the steamer because it destroyed the beauty of nature, but Mildred sees no beauty in the elements of nature.

Mildred is as lost as Yank will ultimately become. She is lost and bored. She becomes a thrill seeker in order to escape her essential nature. The aunt reveals that Mildred became a social worker only for the sensational aspect of the job. Mildred wants to be thought sincere. "I would like to be some use in the world. Is it

my fault I don't know how? I would like to be sincere, to touch life somewhere." The point is that she is so empty that she must seek outside thrills rather than face the essential nature of her self. She knows that she is the "waste product in the Bessemer process." She is therefore a rather neurotic person who assumes an artificial pose. The aunt recognizes this and points out that Mildred would be better off by remaining artificial. When the engineer arrives, Mildred even admits that she doesn't like nature. Thus, she is the anti-natural, the

artificial. Consequently, when she comes to a confrontation with Yank, it will be a meeting between the highly artificial and the brute reality of the world.

Mildred admits that she should stay in her own world of artificiality. "Only stay in the jungle where your spots are camouflage. In a cage they make you conspicuous." The jungle is the world where each person fits in. For Mildred, her jungle is the world where she can say honest and detestable things to her aunt but in a nice, quiet manner. When she steps into the world of Yank, she stands out as the spots of the leopard stand out when in a cage. Thus, each animal must remain in its own surroundings. Likewise, when Yank tries to emerge from his world, he becomes defeated by forces which he doesn't understand. The sense of belonging that each character possesses is only in terms of the world in which that person functions.

The second scene then presents a diametric contrast to the first scene. We now have the two opposing worlds: the world of Yank and brute strength and the world of Mildred and the idle, bored rich. The meeting between the two in the next scene is predestined to be filled with danger.

Scene Three

*Summary*

In the stokehole, the furnaces are being tended by the stokers. The place is filled with noise and heat, reminding one of an inferno. Paddy complains that his back is killing him, and Yank tells him to lie down and croak. Yank feels that this is the type of work which was meant for him. As he shovels the coal, he talks

in a rhythmic fashion to the furnace. His chanting suggests his contentment with his job.

During the work, someone interferes by blowing a whistle. This act infuriates Yank because he feels that the engineer or someone else is interfering with his job. While the men turn their backs to tend the furnace again, Mildred enters escorted by the second and

fourth engineers. The whistle blows again, and this time Yank looks up to the upper levels and shouts insults in a "gorilla-like" fashion. Mildred hears his threats and sees him pounding on his dirty chest and she turns pale white. When Yank turns around and sees Mildred, he suddenly becomes speechless.

Mildred is overcome by the spectacle she has seen, and as she is about to faint, she calls Yank a "filthy beast." After she has fainted, the engineers drag her from the stokehole, and Yank is left hurling curses at an empty wall.

*Commentary*

Once again, note the tremendous contrast between the two scenes. From the bright-lighted deck, we return to the stokehole, which should suggest some type of burning and heated placean inferno, a fiery modern prison. Again, the men are seen "in silhouette in the crouching, inhuman attitudes of chained gorillas." O'Neill is constantly reminding us of his central image, of man as the ape-like figure, confined to a hell of fire and smoke in spite of the fact that Yank continually denies this implication. Ultimately, then, man is seen again as being caged in by this situation.

Yank is seen in the midst of his work, and we get the impression that he is content and happy in it. The imagery suggests that he almost caresses his work and the furnace in terms of a sexual pleasure. The opening makes it clear that Yank is in his rightful place, and he begrudges any interference by outside forces. His sense of belonging to this place makes him resent the engineers

who blow their whistle. Consequently, when Mildred enters, Yank is fighting against any outside interference.

At Mildred's entrance, she "turns pale, her pose is crumbling, she shivers with fright in spite of the blazing heat." This is symbolic of the conspicuousness she feels when she has entered a cage to which she does not belong. Later on, as she listens to Yank's speech, she is "paralyzed with horror, terror, her whole personality crushed, beaten in, collapsed, by the terrific impact of this unknown, abysmal brutality." What she has heard is Yank, the animal enraged at the

idea of someone invading his domain. Yank, however, is raging against the possible interference of the engineer and does not know that Mildred is behind him. His cry has been that of a brute animal who fights to preserve the one world to which he belongs.

Note the contrast between the men and their dirt and Mildred and her pale, white, and ghostly presence. It is likewise important that neither Mildred nor Yank knows how to react in the presence of the other person. In this scene, the emphasis is on the action as *seen* on the stage. The impact of the scene lies in the visual aspects. Furthermore, the audible aspect is important because we hear the whistling, the burning, the clanging of the door when Mildred is taken out. This final image again supports the idea of the prison as the door clangs shut upon this caged world of the stokers.

Horrified at Yank's bellowing, and his dust-caked body, she cries "Oh, the filthy beast!" and faints. It is this chance, violent encounter that opens Yank's eyes to his true position, to awareness that he does not belong as he has imagined that he did. The earth does not belong to him and those who "make it run" but to a group who see in him and his kind a "filthy beast," a hairy ape.

Yank's position is forever destroyed because of his first glimpse of his actual, objective position in the social order. After this, he tries to become a thinking person and determine his exact relationship to society and the world, but being unable to see himself logically and coherently, he ends by resorting to the

brute animal world represented in the end by the gorilla in the cage at the zoo.

## Scene Four

*Summary*

In the fireman's forecastle, Yank is discovered sitting in an attitude resembling Rodin's "The Thinker." The other men are telling Yank that he forgot to wash and that the coal dust will get under his skin if he doesn't wash soon. Yank replies that he is trying to think, a notion which confuses the other men. Long interrupts and interprets the previous episode as indicative of the struggle

between social classes. He has found out that Mildred's father is a "bleedin' millionaire, a bloody Capitalist," and he suggests that the monied class are keeping the workingmen like "bloody animals." He suggests that they should make appeals in the name of the law or the government or God. However, no one pays any attention to him.

Paddy describes the previous encounter with Mildred, who reacted as though she had seen a "great hairy ape excaped from the Zoo!" Yank hears this and wonders if Mildred did call him a hairy ape. Believing that she has, he maintains that he will not let her get away with it. In some way he will punish her. He tries to ridicule her by comparing her puny, white arms to his big, muscular arms, and constantly maintains that she "don't belong."

The more Yank thinks about the insult, the more he is determined to get even with her immediately. He begins to leave the forecastle, and the other men have to pile up on him to hold him down. They have a hard time subduing him, but he is finally restrained. He can only murmur that "She done me doit!. . . I'll get square wit her!"

*Commentary*

The most obvious contrast in the opening of this scene is that of Yank assuming the position of Rodin's statue, "The Thinker." Having been taken out of his self-contentment by Mildred's comment, he must revaluate himself. He proceeds to attempt this by assuming a pose of the thinker, symbolic of the basic level of self-consciousness for the primitive man. This is the Neanderthal Man trying to move into the position of the civilized man.

In the second scene, Mildred had mentioned that the leopard looks good in the jungle, but in a cage, the spots stand out. Now the voices say to Yank that his thinking will make "spots on youlike a leopard." In other words, Yank, in trying to think, is abandoning his true nature, and the results will stand out as artificial as do the spots of a leopard in a cage.

Again, note the reaction of the men to Yank's statement that he is trying to think. Each time, the reaction has a "brazen, metallic quality," suggesting the inhuman quality and monotony of their lives. It contrasts with Yank's feeble attempts to gain something more meaningful from life.

Long's socialist views are presented more directly here. To express his ideas, he likens the men to monkeys in a menagerie. This image brings us back to the central theme of the brute quality of the men. As Edwin A. Engel in *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill* points out: "Long tries once again to penetrate the primitive mentality, and again he fails." In other words, Long tries to make Yank see that the struggle is between the classes, but Yank is only concerned with his own personal sense of belonging. Long thinks that the law, the government, or God should support their position. But the men reject all three, emphasizing that men of their category are not the concern of the law, government, or God. Their realization that such forces do not concern themselves with the common man allows Yank then to concentrate solely upon his own personal sense of worth.

We should note that the title "Hairy Ape" is first mentioned in this scene. Actually, Mildred did not call Yank a hairy ape, but after this scene he assumes that she did, and this assumption is what Yank must contend with.

At the end of the scene, he tries to re-establish his own sense of belonging by tearing Mildred down. He compares the muscles in his arm with the disgusting skinniness of the girl. His indignation is directed only at the girl and at her flagrant lack of understanding of his true nature. "Hairy ape, huh. . . I'll show her

I'm better'n her, if she on'y know it. I belong and she don't." Yank has still not abandoned the idea that he belongs, and if he can effect some type of personal vengeance against the girl, he will be saved. Thus, he threatens to leave immediately and "bust de face offen her." By this demonstration of brute force, Yank will regain his sense of security in the world. But as he is about to leave, he is trapped by the men and is held in the same way that a captured ape would be held. His desire for vindication will lead him to Fifth Avenue,

symbolic of the core of Mildred's world. But we must emphasize that he is not fighting against the society but only against the personal, individual insult.

## Scene Five

*Summary*

Three weeks later, Long takes Yank to Fifth Avenue on a Sunday morning. Long is dressed in shore clothes, but Yank is still wearing dirty dungarees and has not shaved for days. They stop in front of a furrier's, when Yank asks where "her kind" are. Yank, although born in New York, has never seen Fifth Avenue and is impressed with it for a moment but then feels uncomfortable. He wonders why Long brought him here, and Long tells him that he can get even with her kind. Yank, however, wants personal revenge and does not understand what Long means. Long tries to explain that he wants to "awaken yer bloody clarss consciousness. Then yer'll see it's 'er clarss yer've got to fight, not 'er alone."

Long then points out how much the jewelry costs and thinks that one piece will buy food for a starving family for a year. Yank only finds the jewelry to be attractive. But when he discovers the price for a piece of fur made from monkey fur, he becomes enraged. He feels that this is a personal insult to him.

At this time, church lets out and the rich begin to pass by. Long warns Yank to look at them but to keep his mouth shut. But Yank wants to come into contact with them, and he begins bumping into passing pedestrians. Long becomes frightened and slips away. Yank begins to insult the people, but he is politely

ignored. He asserts that he belongs amid all this steel, but that these people do not belong. But as he talks, no one notices him. Finally, he tries to attack one man, and the man calls an officer. In a few minutes, a large number of policemen are there holding Yank down. Meanwhile, the rich people continue looking at the furs and have not known that there was a disturbance.

*Commentary*

In scene five, Fifth Avenue is not still Fifth Avenue, but a distorted projection of Yank's own hate-filled mind: "The general effect of a background of magnificence cheapened and made grotesque by commercialism, a background in tawdry disharmony with the clear light and sunshine on the street itself."

Long has brought Yank here in order to develop in him some type of social-consciousness: "I wants to awaken yer bloody clarss consciousness." But Yank still sees his problem in terms of the personal and not as a class struggle. Whereas Long wants to take Fifth Avenue and make this particular into a universal, Yank is concerned only with his particular world, not with the universal.

In the opening of the scene, we note that Yank has seemingly regressed, as shown by the fact that he has not shaved and is still dressed in the dirty clothes stained with coal and grease. His entire activity is devoted to an attempt to obtain revenge for his personal insult.

The difference between Yank and Long is further emphasized by each's reaction to the jewelry and the fur in the Fifth Avenue shops. Long sees each piece of jewelry as something which could feed a starving family for a year, but Yank only thinks of them as pretty ornaments. However, when the fur is mentioned, especially since it is monkey fur, Yank feels a personal identification and becomes incensed that this type of people would gloat over buying monkey fur. Yank interprets this in terms of himself: "Trowing it up in my face! Christ! I'll fix her!"

The rich people in this scene have nothing in common with real people. "The women are rouged, calcimined, dyed, overdressed to the nth degree." They emerge talking of Doctor Caiaphas, who in ancient times was the high priest who accused Jesus of being a rebel attempting to upset the existing order of things because Jesus preached doctrines of universal brotherhood. This is an interesting analogy to the present situation. Long is the Marxist who is interested in universal brotherhood, and Jesus was interested in the same

thing. Thus the high priest for the wealthy is named after the man who accused Jesus. Note that he preached against the "false doctrines" of the radicals. Consequently, Jesus' doctrines may be seen to be closer to Long's view than to those expressed by the good Doctor Caiaphas.

As the people walk down the street, they are seen as manikins with mechanical accents, and they neither hear, see, nor react to Yank and his furious tirades against them. As he seeks to ruffle their poise, he is himself rebuffed. Note furthermore the description of the men: "The men are in Prince Alberts, high hats, spats, canes, etc. A procession of gaudy marionettes, yet with something of the relentless horror of Frankenstein monsters in their detached, mechanical unawareness." Thus, this scene and its method of presentation exemplify O'Neill's attempt to write expressionistic drama, that is, drama that expresses something of the inner state of Yank's mind. It is to him that these people seem totally unreal and like manikins.

O'Neill has subtitled his play "A comedy of ancient and modern life." The significance of this subtitle is illustrated most clearly in this scene. Here the people represent puppets and marionettes. In ancient times puppets and marionettes held a high position and functioned as the symbol of the greatness of man. As Gordon Craig has pointed out in his *On the Art of Theater*, "the audience will laugh at [the puppet] because none but his weaknesses are left to him. He reflects these from [the audience] because you would not have laughed at him in his prime. If we should laugh at and insult the memory of the puppet, we should be laughing at the fall that we have brought about in ourselveslaughing at the

beliefs and images we have broken." Thus, in this play, the human race is reduced to the tragic fall of the puppet. We laugh at Yank in a sense because he is not much more than a human ape, but at the same time, it is somewhat tragic that man has fallen to this lower position in the world. As another critic, Barret H. Clark, points out: Yank is the modern Everyman, ". . .a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way."

In showing the upper class's scorn for the lower class, O'Neill is not taking sides and is not advocating any type of socialist position. Instead, he is merely presenting a problem as it exists and is not offering any solution. In actuality, the fact that Long "slinks off" when a direct confrontation is about to be made indicates a certain unsavory quality about him. He can advocate justice of the classes only in the abstract, but when the actual tests come, he prefers to retire to the background.

Although Yank is unable to force himself upon the upper class, he still relies upon his basic qualities of force. In other words, he is using brute force to intimidate the upper class. He still sees himself as "steel and steam and smoke and de rest of it." It will not be until the next scene that he will turn against steel. And it will be his force and his attempt to use brute strength that will bring about his imprisonment.

## Scene Six

### *Summary*

In a row of cells in a jail, Yank is seen sitting in the position of Rodin's "The Thinker" again. His head is bandaged, and in thinking aloud, he assumes that he is now in a zoo. A burst of laughter is heard from some of the other cells. Yank then realizes that he must have been dreaming, because "de apes don't talk." Other prisoners tell him that he is indeed in a cage. After some more kidding, Yank warns the other prisoners that he is "a hairy ape," and he will kill the others if they don't lay off kidding him. The others assume that Yank has gone crazy from the beating given him by the police.

After Yank explains that someone did him dirt, the prisoners think some girl has deserted him. Yank explains that it was a rich woman who looked upon him like he was something from a menagerie. One prisoner tells him that if he wants to get "back at the dame," he should join the Wobblies. He tells Yank about a newspaper article where some senator has recently attacked these Wobblies as being un-American. Yank is impressed with the article and tries to think about it.

After some moments of deliberation, he recognizes that he had always thought that he belonged to steel, and now it is steel which has him imprisoned. He tries to break out and is actually bending the bars of the prison cell when a guard appears, becomes frightened and yells for the other guards to turn on the water hose.

*Commentary*

This particular scene is ultra-expressionistic. As the play progresses, the scenes become distorted as Yank's mind becomes distorted, and we slowly realize that we are witnessing a view of life as seen through the eyes of Yank. In some scene designs, the cells are shown diagonally, so that we don't get a flat picture but, instead, a rather long distorted view of the rows of cells, the mere picture being one that emphasizes Yank's isolation. Note also that the other prisoners are never seen, just heard.

Furthermore, the cells suggest something of a continuation from the cramped quarters of the forecastle in the first scene. This scene also looks forward to the final one, in which Yank is in the cage in the zoo. In fact, when Yank regains consciousness in the jail, he thinks at first that he is in the zoo.

The "Thinker" pose is again prominent. Once again, Yank has been shocked out of the security of his position, and he again assumes the "Thinker" pose in order to determine his place in the universe, his place of belonging.

Yank, now as the Thinker, realizes for the first time that he cannot fight Mildred as a person. He knows that he must now take it out on the "Gang she runs with." Ironically, this was

earlier what Long was trying to get Yank to understand. But Yank still plans to use some type of force. He now hears of the IWW, an organization with which he believes he can identify and belong.

It is highly ironical that Yank learns about the Industrial Workers of the World from the report of a speech by a senator who wants to destroy the organization because it is going to "make of our sweet and lovely civilization a shambles, a desolation where man, God's masterpiece, would soon degenerate back to the ape!" As

soon as Yank hears this last word, he allows his sense of personal insult to carry him to a complete sympathy with the organization.

Finally, in the end of the scene, Yank realizes that he is not steel, that he is, instead, locked in and trapped by steel. He then resolves to become fire and destroy with fire. With this determination, he assumes a monkey-like pose as he attempts to break out of the jail. But as always, Yank is beaten back by superior forces.

We should not mistake O'Neill's aims in his discussion of the IWW. By the use of literary allusion, O'Neill takes a middle position concerning this type of organization. In his speech, the senator had referred to the organization in terms of the "foul conspiracy of Catiline," but an educated person knows that, while Catiline was a champion of the common people, he has in no way been universally considered heroic. Ben Jonson presented him as a villain out to destroy the existing order of things. Another dramatist, Ibsen, presented him as a hero of the people. However, in the next scene, we will discover that IWW is neither the hero of the common man as seen by Long or Catiline or Ibsen nor is it destructive as seen by the senator, Cato, or Ben Jonson. It is, instead, just a common organization and is just what it says it is. Ultimately, in terms of the play, the IWW is presented as rather unsympathetic, as we will see in the next scene.

## Scene Seven

### *Summary*

A month later, Yank is released from prison, and goes to the IWW local near the waterfront. He asks the secretary to be allowed to join, but even has to think a minute before he can remember his real nameRobert Smith. Furthermore, Yank is confused because there are no secrets and because the initiation fee is only fifty cents. He had expected much more. He keeps stressing that he belongs and that the men don't need to worry about him.

Yank is further disappointed when he is told that everything about the IWW is lawful and that the organization does not hide anything. "Yuh mean to say yuh always run wide openlike dis?"

Yank asks. He then hears that the organization stands for changing "the unequal conditions of society by legitimate direct action," but Yank was seeking some group that wanted to dynamite thingsespecially steel. In fact, he tells the group that he will blow up the steel plants with dynamite and will be willing to serve life imprisonment for it. Then he would be able to write a letter to "dat broad" and "tell her de hairy ape done it. Dat'll square things."

At this point the secretary has Yank searched and then calls to some other men to throw him out. The secretary accuses Yank of being a paid agent of the Secret Service and calls him a "brainless ape."

Sitting outside, Yank thinks that "dem boids don't tink I belong, neider." He now wonders what he can do and asks himself "where do I get off, huh?" A policeman answers his question by threatening to put Yank in jail. Yank leaves, wondering "Where do I go from here?"

*Commentary*

Note the opening setting again. There is an air of the common and the barren surrounding the IWW office. At a later date, O'Neill stated that all the scenes from the fourth one on should be played with masks covering all the faces except Yank's. But in the first stage directions, he suggests that the secretary's face should be shaded so that we see only a part of him.

Here in this scene, we find out Yank's real name for the first time. Or at least, one may suppose it is Yank's name. Actually, it could be a name Yank made up because he may have actually

forgotten his own name. Under any circumstances, the name Robert Smith re-emphasizes the American "Everyman" quality of the play.

We should also note that Yank has discovered something about his former comrades. Yank has progressed to a point where he can no longer return to the simple life on board ship because his former companions are "dead to de woild."

Yank expects much more from the IWW than he finds there. First, he is seeking some place where he can find a sense of

belonging. And he needs an organization built on force and strength so that he will blend in with it and find this sense of belonging. So, true to his basic nature, he seeks some organization where he can use his brute strength and force to belong.

It is highly ironic that the men at the IWW think that Yank is from the Secret Service. In throwing him out, they call him a brainless ape. This brings to Yank's mind his inability to belong to any group. He then assumes the attitude of the Thinker again in a final attempt to arrive at a sense of belonging. The scene ends in almost utter despair and isolation and Yank realizes that there is no place for him to go and that he is on the verge of complete destruction.

Scene Eight

*Summary*

The next day, Yank goes to the "monkey house at the Zoo." He stops before a cage in which there is a large gorilla "squatting on his haunches on a bench in much the same attitude as Rodin's 'Thinker.'" Yank admires the great brute strength of the animal and explains that they both are members of the same club.

Yank talks to the gorilla about the difficulty of belonging in this world and then decides to free the gorilla. Together they will belong to a world that can't build cages strong enough to keep them imprisoned. Yank takes a bar from under his coat and forces the cage door open. When the gorilla is free, Yank wants to shake hands"de secret grip of our order"but the animal suddenly becomes enraged and crushes Yank with his powerful

grip. The gorilla stands over the crushed body of Yank and then puts Yank in the cage and disappears.

After the gorilla leaves, Yank knows he is dying and realizes that even "him [the gorilla] didn't tink I belonged." Yank then dies in his cage.

*Commentary*

This scene is similar to the jail scene in the fact that there is here also a single cage, and earlier there was a single cell. The rest of the cages are offstage somewhere in the distance.

The sign of the gorilla is the most dominant thing on the stage. Notice that the gorilla is seen in the same "Thinker" pose that Yank has so often assumed, making another analogy between the two. As Yank approaches the gorilla, he has a strong sense of admiration for the brute strength and force of the animal. These are the same qualities that Yank has been proud of in himself.

The reason that Yank comes to the cage is that he realizes finally the truth of Paddy's statement in the first scene. Man, as Paddy has said, has lost his relationship with nature. Yank now recognizes the value of nature: "I been warmin' a bench down to de Batteryever since last night. Sure. I seen de sun come up. Dat was pretty, tooall red and pink and green. . . . De sun was warm, dey wasn't no clouds, and dere was a breeze blowin'. Sure, it was great stuff. I got it aw rightwhat Paddy said about dat bein' de right dopeon'y I couldn't get *in* it, see? I couldn't belong in dat." That is, finding no place to belong even in nature, he returns to his symbolic namesake and hopes that with the gorilla, they will be members of the same clubthe "hairy ape club."

But Yank's position is worse than the gorilla's. Mildred had compared Yank to a hairy ape (actually a filthy beast), but we now see that the comparison is not valid. Yank is in a worse cage than the gorilla because Yank's cage is not physical. The gorilla is better off because a gorilla should not belong with people, but Yank should. The gorilla can dream of the past, but there is no past for Yank. Yank points this out to the gorilla: "Youse can sit and dope dream in de past, green woods, de jungle and de rest of it. Den yuh belong and dey don't." In the jungle the gorilla

would belong where humans would not. Here in society, Yank should belong, and he does not. Thus, there is no place for Yank.

Yank makes his final effort to belong when he frees the gorilla and makes an attempt to join him in brotherhood. But even the gorilla rejects Yank and kills him. Yank feels that his place of belonging is in the cage where the gorilla had thrown him. He comes to this realization just as he is dying. And the tragic irony is that here is where man belongs in the modern world. Seemingly, O'Neill's final comment is that modern man is helpless and trapped and finds his sense of belonging only by being trapped in a cage.

# Character Analyses

## Yank

In this 1922 expressionistic monodrama O'Neill explores the ontological problem of modern man's existence. It is through the character of Yank that this psychological study of one's sense of being unfolds. To emphasize the consciousness of dispossession, O'Neill has cast his protagonist as the American "Yank." Consequently, he has no nostalgic association with the past, he has no European tradition with which to identify. In today's scientific and materialistic society Yank must look to power and steel for his sense of belonging, if it is to be achieved at all.

As the play opens we find an articulate Yank in the firemen's forecastle. He is even lyrical in his exultation of coal, steel, and steam. Having based his self-concept on an illusion that his "bestial" task is fundamental to progress; Yank feels secure in his position. He has a home, he belongs. Neither the nostalgic sentimentalism of Paddy nor the socialistic harangues of Long can shake his adamant convictions.

But Yank's false identity is completely shattered when he encounters the blueblood Mildred Douglas who comes "slumming" into the stokehole. Overcome by the filth of the environment and shocked at the sheer brutality of the stoker, Mildred cries "Oh, the filthy beast!" and faints. Only now is Yank's security threatened, only now does he begin to realize that perhaps he too does not belong. In order to reinforce his selfhood Yank sees a personal justification of his position.

Unlike Long, Yank does not see that Mildred's attitude is indicative of the entire capitalistic class. His self-justification is only aimed at the individual. Thus, the materialistic emblems of the upper class found at Fifth Avenue do not have any immediate effect upon him. When the puppet-like inhabitants enter, Yank attempts to show his worth, to flex his muscles, to prove his identity. His indignation at their casual and indifferent rejection of him leads to imprisonment and a re-evaluation of his beliefs.

Yank sees through the illusion of his own making. No longer is he the creator of steel; he is its prisoner . . . held captive by the

industrial giants of the world. This new-found class-consciousness is augmented by the cynicism of the inmates, who extol the IWW as the salvation of the common man. Refocusing his attention on a more universal level, Yank sets out to overthrow the capitalists by force. Again he is met by failure. The IWW is shown to be only an ineffectual and superficial organization which mocks Yank's assertion of identity through force and violence. Finally convinced of his *social* dispossession, Yank's last attempt at some reconciliation with the universe leads him to the zoo. Hoping here to find a place to belong, he searches out his animal namesake, the ape. A return to nature, to pre-civilized primitivism is his last resort, for the present society affords the self-sufficient man of muscle no refuge. He can go nowhere else. His hopes are quickly dashed, however, and he acknowledges that even the gorilla has a tradition and a *raison d'etre* which is alien to him. Having freed the ape from his steel cage, it is highly appropriate that Yank should die within its confines. Here is where he belongs, here is the identifiable structure which he sought. Modern man can no longer fit in Nature, his "supra-natural" environment is the cage. For Man is now the victim of progress, the *victim* of this new mechanized and galvanized civilization. Imprisoned by steel and iron, he can only cry out in his helplessness.

Paddy

Paddy, "an old, wizened Irishman," reacts to the harsh conditions of the stokehole and the general disparity of the mechanized world by extolling a nostalgic return to the past. He escapes from the present reality by drinking and by dreaming futile dreams. A

clear representative of nineteenth-century Romantic idealism, where man stood in a one-to-one relationship with Nature, Paddy laments the loss of this mystical oneness. In the days of his youth, sailors recognized the clipper ships as their home and the sea as their mother. But "nobody cares" for him in this present cage, where he is denied the clear sky in return for a burning inferno. With the onset of steam and steel, he has been dispossessed. He no longer belongs. Consequently, Paddy resents Yank's acceptance of the stokehole existence, a deluded awareness which instills a false deceptive security. With biting satire, he makes Yank conscious of the truth in Mildred's assertion: Yank is indeed a "hairy ape."

Along with Mildred and Long, Paddy represents one of the possible alternatives to an awakening consciousness in modern society. Yank cannot accept this position, however, for he is a "yank" and thus severed from all ties with a glorious tradition. He does not have a Victorian past to remember.

Long

Long, like Paddy, is conscious of the bestial and inhumane treatment to which the stokers are subjected. But his reactions to the problem veer in a totally different direction. Rejecting all attempts at resurrecting an irretrievable past, Long looks forward to the Marxist society of communal brotherhood. Constantly on his "soapbox," he expounds upon the workers' inalienable rights. Long sees the plight of the stokers to be the direct outgrowth of the decline in class solidarity. The capitalist class has forced the worker to become a slave to wages, incapable of any self-esteem. Unity of brotherhood, with all men free and equal, has thus been thwarted. Voicing the socialist doctrinesequality through social revolutionLong urges reform. As voters and citizens, the workers of the world can unite and achieve equality.

Yank's failure to grasp this class-consciousness leads Long to take him to Fifth Avenue. While there, the socialistic "radical" scorns the materialistic and prejudicial bent of the social system as it exists. When Yank tries to assimilate this philosophy with his own, that of equality through brute force, the debacle of the IWW meeting results. The zealots of socialism and social reform voice mere words; the tenets of Marx merely hide a meaningless and sterile structure. Again Yank is forced to reject this alternative.

Mildred

Mildred Douglas is the "natural" offspring of the mechanized and materialistic society. A rich blueblood socialiteher father being the president of Nazareth SteelMildred is bored with the inconsequential nature of her surroundings with all its "proper" amenities. She, like Long and Paddy, is aware of the sense of dispossession and insecurity which modern society instills in its

"conscious" inhabitants. In an almost neurotic fashion, Mildred assumes various acceptable "roles." These poses represent the general role-playing of the upper class, who fail in their attempts to gain any lasting security. The anemically white coloring of her outfit is indicative of Mildred's own shallowness, and also the shallowness of her intentions.

Feigning a sociological interest, Mildred enters the stokehole and encounters Yank. Now, divorced from her own environment, she is unable to cope with this specimen of unvarnished Nature. Her defenses are shattered, and she faints.

## General Evaluation

Eugene O'Neill felt that the primary characteristic of his age was the disintegration of valuesmoral, spiritual, and religious. As an artist, O'Neill had to come to terms with the root of this dissolution. In this play O'Neill attempts to symbolize the relationship between modern man and his universe, a universe in which the desires of men to "belong" are mere playthings in the hands of a capricious deterministic force. He focuses his attention on the social outcast, whose rootless, bitter struggle against a hostile society is symbolic of the position of mankind in an indifferent universe.

*The Hairy Ape* is a social drama, but for O'Neill the social problem is only the touchstone to a larger problem, and social dislocation is only a symbol of a more profound cosmic dislocation. Yank's speech after his ejection from the IWW hall makes this clear: "So dem boids don't tink I belong neider. Aw, to

hell wit 'em! Dey're in de wrong pewde same old bullsoapboxes and Salvation Armyno guts!"

The theme of *The Hairy Ape* is the profound spiritual poverty and disharmony which, beginning as a by-product of the industrial age, soon became its most dominant characteristic. When Yank says, "Aw, hell! I can't seeit's all dark, get me? It's all wrong!" he is reminiscent of Hamlet, who cries, "the time is out of joint."

Shakespeare's hero, like Yank, could not find a spiritual place in the universe. By having Yank specifically reject the trade-union solution to his problems, and by implying the spiritual kinship with Hamlet, O'Neill takes his play out of the realm of simple social drama and relates it to what he has called "man and his struggle with his own fate."

The play uses as its point of departure the shattering of a myth. Yank, a stoker on a modern ocean-going ship, believes that he is a vital part of the social order: "Say! What's dem slobs in de foist cabin got to de wit us? We're better men dan dey are, ain't we? Dey're just baggage. Who makes dis old tub run? Ain't it us guys? Well den, we belong, don't we?"

His view, of course, is pure illusion. The direct, personal, creative relationship between a man and his work which existed in a bygone age has been shattered by the impersonal, mechanical relationships of the Industrial Age. The gargantuan pleasure derived by Yank from his labor is founded on a conception of his role in society and the universe which is fundamentally false and illusory. Only in Yank's mind is it that he "runs dis tub"; as far as the world he lives in is concerned, he is a mere mechanical appendage to the furnace he feeds. Yank's exultant speech is countered by that of his friend, Paddy, who sailed in days when the relationship of ship and man was totally different: "'Twas them days men belonged to ships, not now. 'Twas them days a ship was part of the sea, and a man was part of a ship, and the seas joined all together and made it one."

But Yank's myth, the myth that he is an integral part of progress, the all-important "bottom" of society, is forever destroyed when

he is given his first glimpse of his actual, objective position in the social order. Mildred Douglas, a somewhat neurotic and unsympathetic daughter of the rich, capitalistic class, arranges with the ship's captain to tour the stokehole. In the red light of the furnaces she sees Yank at work. Horrified at his bellowing and his coldust-caked body, she cries, "Oh, the filthy beast!" and faints. It is this chance, violent encounter that opens Yank's eyes to his true position, to the realization that he does not "belong" as he imagined he

did. The earth does not belong to him and those who "make it run," but to a group who see in him and his kind a "filthy beast," a "hairy ape."

At first his indignation is directed only at the girl and at her flagrant lack of understanding of his true role: "I scared her? Why de hell should I scare her? Who de hell is she? Ain't she de same as me? Hairy ape, huh? I'll show her I'm better'n her, if she on'y knew it, I belong and she don't, see?"

His search for vindication leads him to Fifth Avenue, where his attempts to assert his power disturb no one, and only lead him to a prison cell. At this point Yank has come to understand the nature of his own delusion, that far from being the force behind the steel, he is the *victim* of steel. Having been robbed of his humanity, his pride in his work, and reduced, literally, to the status of a domesticated ape, Yank reacts bitterly against the very steel with which he had previously declared his kinship: "He made disdis cage! Steel! It don't belong, dat's what! Cages, cells, locks, bolts, barsdat's what it means!holding me down." He now sees his role as a destroyer, tearing down the industrial pillars of the society which has dehumanized him. But when he presents his objectives to the IWW he is thrown out as a spy, and discovers that he does not belong here either.

Passing from rebuff to rebuff, Yank finds himself at last in the city zoo, confronting his animal namesake: "Youse can sit and dope dream in de past, green woods, de jungle and de rest of it. Den yuh kin laugh at 'em, see? Yuh're de champ of de woild, but meI ain't got no past to tink in, nor nothin' dat's comin', on'y what's nowand dat don't belong." As a human being, Yank

cannot "belong" in the animal way that the gorilla belongs, and when he attempts to do so, he is destroyed. Yank opens the gorilla's cage; the gorilla lurches out, and as Yank comes forward to meet him, clasps Yank in a deadly, bone-crushing embrace. The "hairy ape" is tossed into the steel prison and painfully mourns: "He got me aw right. I'm trou. Even him didn't tink I belonged. Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in?"

O'Neill's hero, Yank, is hindered by hypersensitivity or an unwarranted faith in himself. He is an outstanding example of a figure, below the "norm" defined by society, who fails to regard the conventions of society as the *only* ends in life. Indeed, he feels confident that upon his shoulders rests the fate of the universe. When this faith in the importance of his superhuman endurance is shattered, the gradual disintegration of Yank begins. This crisis induces in him the need for spiritual reappraisal. He attempts to ascend the ladder of values; he realizes that simply fulfilling a mechanical task does not justify one's own existence, nor does it justify life itself. He strives in vain to discern some universal order in which to belong. In O'Neill's eyes, Yank is the modern "Everyman." According to Barret H. Clark's *Eugene O'Neill*, Yank is "a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way." With the mechanical development of society, the individual is lost. A sense of "not-belonging" pervades every man of feeling, every Yank, in this hostile, materialistic universe.

The structure which O'Neill employs in rendering this unending quest of modern man is distinctly expressionistic and symbolic in form. With the absence of plot in the conventional sense of the word, this play represents the working-out of a psychological state, in which conflicts with other human beings are clearly subordinate to the psychological conflict within the hero. Each of the eight short scenes seeks to depict a stage in this psychic development. Here, however, the expressionistic techniques are explored more boldly, and as the action becomes more intense,

the settings lose their correspondence to reality. They strive to reflect the psychological condition of the hero.

Thus, the stokehole of scene three is still a stokehole, but in his stage directions O'Neill obviously endeavors to suggest an Inferno, a fiery modern prison. "Then, from these fiery round holes in the black a flood of terrific light and heat pours full upon the men who are outlined in silhouette in the crouching inhuman attitudes of chained gorillas." In scene five, however, Fifth Avenue is not still Fifth Avenue, but a distorted projection of Yank's own hatefilled mind: "The Jeweler's window is gaudy with glittering

diamonds, emeralds, rubies, pearls, etc., fashioned in ornate tiaras, crowns, necklaces, collars, etc." The people in this scene also have nothing in common with real people. They are "a procession of gaudy marionettes, yet with something of the relentless horror of Frankenstein monsters in their detached, mechanical unawareness." These "manikins" with mechanical accents neither hear, see, nor react to Yank and his furious tirades against them, and as he seeks to ruffle their poise, he is himself rebuffed. "He turns in a rage on the Men, bumping viciously into them but not jarring them the least bit. Rather it is he who recoils after each collision."

This expressionistic technique is extraordinarily effective in communicating the bewildered helplessness of Yank's newly found awareness that he does not belong.

O'Neill, moreover, augmented his stage symbolism through the use of other theatrical devices, particularly costumes and masks. For the first production in March, 1922, Blanche Hays designed the costumes. In addition to the "Fifth Avenue" outfits, the costume of Mildred Douglas also was symbolically significant. "She was outfitted with a snowy white, crepe de Chine gown, white cloak and white hat with flowing veil, to point up the contrast with the grimy, coal-blackened stokers in their glowing inferno." Since *The Hairy Ape* was the first play in which O'Neill introduced masks in the symbolic sense, the task of designing them was also undertaken by Miss Hays. Indeed, it was her suggestion to use masks in the Fifth Avenue scene. Ten years later O'Neill admitted that he would have employed more masks in the play had he been aware of their effectiveness. In order to

convey his meaning, and evoke the proper mood and atmosphere, O'Neill makes use of further theatrical devices, including the "Thinker" pose of Yank and the song, "Whiskey Johnny," intoned by Paddy.

*The Hairy Ape* is expressionistic and symbolic in form because the author deliberately subordinates plausibility of language and situation to the essential need of making his theme clear. The people do not talk or act as they would in real life, because O'Neill wishes to give us things they *feel,* which reach us only by faint and allusive indications. Given the nature of his subject and his technique, one

can readily attest to *The Hairy Ape* as a symbolic tragedy of modern man.

## Questions for Review

1. To what extent is *The Hairy Ape* a social drama?

2. What is meant by an "expressionistic setting"?

3. Is Yank symbolic of modern man?

4. Discuss the roles of Paddy and Long.

5. Can Yank be seen as a tragic figure? Is the drama tragedy?

6. How important is it to modern man to have a sense of belonging?

7. How much does Mildred suggest the Fifth Avenue people of scene five?

8. Does O'Neill offer a solution for modern man?

9. To what extent is this play an expressionistic drama?

10. What is the connotation of Yank's name?

11. How important is the animal imagery throughout the drama?

12. Does Yank increase in self-awareness during the course of the play?

13. Does Yank regress in social standing during the course of the play?

14. What is the function of the IWW?
15. Trace the "cage" imagery throughout the play.

# MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA

## List of Characters

Ezra Mannon
The proud and cold head of the Mannon household, who at the opening of the play is a general in the army during the Civil War.

Christine Mannon
Ezra's wife, whose love soon turned to hate and who has taken as a lover Adam Brant, a cousin of Ezra Mannon.

Lavinia Mannon
Ezra's daughter, who was rejected by her mother and who has formed a strong (Electra) attachment to her father.

Orin Mannon
Ezra's son, who was spoiled by his mother and who has a strong (Oedipus) attachment to his mother.

Adam Brant
Christine's lover and a distant relative of Ezra Mannon. Adam is determined to revenge some old wrongs against his mother by the Mannons.

Peter Niles
Lavinia's young suitor, whom she plans to marry.

Hazel Niles
Peter's sister, who is engaged to Orin Mannon.

Seth Beckwith (and others)
Seth is the Mannon gardener, who serves along with other townspeople as a type of chorus to comment upon the Mannon household.

## Brief Synopsis

The Mannons have long been the principal family in their New England community. As the play opens, Ezra Mannon is away fighting in the Civil War as a general, accompanied by his son, Orin. During Mannon's absence, his wife Christine meets and falls in love with Adam Brant, a rejected and disinherited relative of the Mannons. Christine, through her hatred of her husband, and Adam Brant, through his desire for revenge, are determined to kill Ezra Mannon when he returns from the war. However, Ezra's daughter Lavinia learns that her mother is having an affair with Adam Brant, and she warns Christine that she will write to Ezra Mannon if the affair does not terminate immediately.

When Ezra Mannon returns, Lavinia tries to absorb his time and

protect him, but as soon as he goes to his bedroom with his wife, an argument begins. When Ezra calls for some medicine for his heart, Christine gives some pills that Adam Brant secured for her. Before Ezra dies, he calls for Lavinia and accuses Christine of having murdered him. Christine faints, enabling Lavinia to discover the box of pills.

Soon Orin Mannon arrives home terribly disillusioned by the war. As Christine and Lavinia vie for his love, he lets them both know that he would not condemn his mother if she had killed Ezra Mannon, but he could not tolerate the idea of his mother having a lover. Lavinia arranges it so that they can follow Christine one night when she plans to meet her lover. That night, Christine boards Adam Brant's ship for a secret meeting; after she leaves, Orin kills Brant. Returning home, Orin is viciously pleased to tell his mother that he has killed her lover. When Christine begins mourning, Orin tries to pacify her, promising to take her away where just the two of them will live. Christine cannot be consoled and later enters the house and commits suicide. Orin blames himself for this act.

A year later, Orin and Lavinia return from a long voyage to the South Seas, and Orin feels compelled to come home in order to face the ghosts in the house. Lavinia tries to live a normal life, becoming engaged to Peter Niles, while Orin becomes engaged to Peter's sister Hazel. But he cannot escape the ghosts of the past Mannons; thus, he locks himself in the house and begins to write out the true history of the family.

Lavinia, fearful that Orin will reveal their parts in the past deaths, keeps Orin under close surveillance. When he attempts to give Hazel the completed manuscript, Lavinia promises to do anything for him if he will recover the manuscript. Orin does so and later suggests to Lavinia that they should accept their new roles as man and woman and live as husband and wife. The idea of incest horrifies Lavinia; she wishes that Orin would commit

suicide. Orin realizes that death is the only escape for him, and like his mother, he also commits suicide.

Peter is still willing to marry Lavinia but wonders about the contents of the manuscript. At this time, Lavinia realizes that she must expiate herself of all the Mannon sins; therefore, she decides to live with all the ghosts. Ordering the house to be locked up, she plans to live the rest of her days in darkness among the various Mannon ghosts.

# Summaries and Commentaries

## Part OneAct I

### *Summary*

In front of the Mannon house, Seth Beckwith, the Mannon's gardener, appears with some of his relations. He has received permission from Miss Vinnie to show the people around the impressive grounds and house. The relatives inquire about the Mannon family, and Seth tells them about their importance and influence. He hints that even the Mannons have dark secrets which they do not wish known. They are interrupted by the appearance of Christine Mannon, who comes out and walks toward the greenhouse; she is followed soon by her daughter, Lavinia.

Seth excuses himself from his guests, catches up with Lavinia, and asks her where she went while she was away on a visit. Lavinia answers that she has been visiting in New York. Seth wants to tell her something about Captain Adam Brant, who visits the Mannon household periodically. Their conversation is interrupted by the appearance of Peter and Hazel Niles, old friends of the Mannons. Hazel wonders if Lavinia's brother, Orin, has forgotten her, since he doesn't write anymore. Lavinia assures them that her father, General Mannon, would have informed them if anything had happened to Orin.

After Hazel leaves, Peter broaches the subject of marriage with Lavinia, but Lavinia, insistent upon remaining with and caring

for her father, will not consider marriage. When Lavinia's mother appears, Peter makes his excuses and leaves. Lavinia tells her mother, Christine, that the latest reports have it that the Civil War is about over and that they can expect General Mannon home soon. Lavinia also tells her mother that they need to have a long talk soon.

When Christine leaves, Seth returns and tells Lavinia that Captain Adam Brant reminds him of the Mannon side of the family. Years ago, Lavinia's grandfather drove his brother from the house because the brother had gotten a French nurse pregnant. Seth

believes that this Captain Brant could be the son of that union. Lavinia promises that she will test Brant and discover for herself if this is true.

After a few minutes, Captain Brant arrives and begins flirting with Lavinia, who is cold toward him. He reminds her that she was more interested one evening when he told her about his adventures among the naked savages on a South Sea island, and that she responded to his kiss. He tries to hold her again and she reminds him that he is acting like the son of "a low Canuck nurse girl." This accusation infuriates him, and thus Lavinia finds out that Seth's suspicions are true. Brant admits it is true and tells how his mother died from maltreatment at the hands of various Mannons. When she was dying of starvation, she wrote to Lavinia's father for help, but he never answered the letter. Lavinia orders Brant to remain below while she goes and talks to her mother. Brant recoils from such orders, but Lavinia reminds him that if he has any considerations for Christine, he will do as she says. She leaves him standing alone and her looks are those of hatred.

*Commentary*

For the relationship and analogy to the ancient Greek legend, the reader should see the special section in this volume on the Orestia myth.

The time of this play tries to capture somewhat the classical sense of the unity of time. In ancient Greek dramas, the action took place within a twenty-four-hour period; O'Neill confines his time to a day in April and another day only a week later. In other

words, the play begins *in medias res*, in the middle of the action. We learn background information as the play progresses.

Often O'Neill begins a play by showing the exterior of the house; for example, compare this beginning with *Desire Under the Elms*. Here his purpose is to move gradually from the exterior view of the situation into the inner reality. Accordingly, in this play we note first the exterior of the house and then gradually perceive more secrets and inner conflicts.

The outside of the house should resemble a Grecian temple, with six tall columns. The stage directions call for the columns to throw bars across the front of the house reminding one that the house is, in some ways, a type of prison which guards all types of secrets. The columns are also Freudian phallic symbols which support O'Neill's investigation throughout the play of the sexual substructure of the American family. Furthermore, the description of the house emphasizes such qualities as its barren and sterile appearance. There seems to be no life pulsating in the house, and later Christine will refer to it as a tomb. Thus, the violence perpetrated in this house may be directly correlated to the coldness and sterility of its appearance. And finally, the house has "an incongruous white mask fixed" on it. We later hear that the characters appear mask-like, which suggests how each character in some ways conceals his true self from the others.

In direct contrast to the barren sterility of the house is the song which Seth is heard singing at the beginning of the act. The tune of "Shenandoah" represents the lilting rhythm of light romance and adventure, and has something of the "brooding rhythm of the sea."

In a Greek play, there was always a chorus which functioned in multiple ways. One of its functions was to give some background information about the play. Thus, Seth and his relatives function as a sort of chorus, because as we hear the newcomers asking the old servant about the Mannon family, we are also provided with all the background information that we need. Henrik Ibsen developed this type of exposition, which involves an old servant and a newer person whose purpose is to

ask questions. The answers provide the audience with much needed background information. Furthermore, in a Greek play, the chorus would often serve in a capacity of advising the main character, and a little later we note that Seth does undertake to give Lavinia some advice and information about Adam Brant.

In Aristotle's famous discourse on drama he said that the tragic character should come from a high estate and should be a noble person. Since O'Neill models his play on the Greek counterpart, he has the Mannon family be the leading and most powerful family.

And as the Greek play began with the husband off at the Trojan Wars, O'Neill offers the counterpart in General Mannon, who is away fighting in the Civil War. Furthermore, from Seth we hear that Ezra Mannon has been a judge and was elected mayor of the city. Consequently, O'Neill is developing his tragedy around powerful and proud characters. But we later learn that Ezra Mannon studied law and entered politics only because he did not feel loved or at ease around his wife and his various activities were undertaken to cover up his feelings of inadequacy. O'Neill's characters hide their true motives from each other.

In addition to the type of mask that Ezra Mannon wears, we see in the description of Christine that her face gives the impression of a "life-like pale mask." In the next moment, Lavinia appears on the stage and is also described as having "the same strange, life-like mask impression." Through this stage direction, we see a basic similarity among all the Mannons: they conceal or repress some aspect of their true nature.

The contrast and similarity between Lavinia and Christine is highly significant. Both are strikingly handsome and they bear a strong resemblance to each other. The resemblance is heightened by the fact that Christine appears much younger than her forty years and Lavinia, the daughter, appears much older than her twenty-three years. O'Neill is obviously preparing the way for the love triangle which will be developed between mother and daughter. The mere fact that they seem much closer in age than they actually are makes their being rivals in love more plausible.

We note throughout the first part of the trilogy that Lavinia does everything in her power to emphasize the dissimilarity rather

than resemblance between herself and her mother. Their hair is almost exactly the same, but Lavinia wears hers more tightly bound than does her mother, which serves to make them seem closer in age.

After Christine's appearance, Seth's visitors discuss her and also tell the story of Lavinia's grandfather and great-uncle. The uncle had to marry a "French Canuck nurse girl" and the grand-

father had him thrown out of the house. It should be noted that, physically, Christine resembles this French nurse, which might account for the love that Adam Brant feels for Christine.

When Lavinia appears, there is a hatred and enmity in her eyes as she watches the movement of her mother. Seth approaches Lavinia and hints of something mysterious that he wants to tell her. He knows that Lavinia told everyone that she was going visiting in the town recently and actually went to New York to spy on her mother. Seth makes some strange remarks about Captain Brant, but Lavinia is noncommital with this old retainer.

Hazel and Peter function throughout the play as a direct contrast to the Mannons. Both Peter and Hazel are natural and honest in their speech, actions, and motivations. There is nothing hidden and secret about them. They are wholesome figures involved with the deteriorating and perverted Mannons.

Lavinia refuses to marry Peter on the grounds that her father needs her. This turns out to be a bit of dramatic irony, because we later learn that Ezra Mannon really needs his wife, who is not open and honest with him. It is also ironic because Lavinia is unable to help her father or keep him from being killed by Christine.

Throughout this first act, the subject of the South Seas comes up in connection with Adam Brant. Lavinia pretends to hate Brant and to have no desire to know about these South Seas; later we discover that there is a thin line between love and hate and that she takes the trip to the South Seas after her mother's murder.

In developing this love-hate theme, O'Neill has his characters

resemble each other physically. We hear from Seth that Brant resembles both Ezra Mannon and Orin, the two men whom Lavinia has loved the most. Consequently, it is only a narrow step before she loves Brant, who looks like both her father and her brother. Also, as suggested earlier, Brant had a deep affection for his mother, and Christine's personality resembles Marie Brantome's.

In his second conversation with Lavinia, Seth again supplies background information, particularly about Marie Brantome and Lavinia's Uncle David. Most important, we hear that the grandfather built the present house because he thought the affair between Marie Brantome and David Mannon had disgraced the old one. Consequently, the present Mannon edifice was built on repressed jealousy and perverted ideas about disgrace.

Lavinia's conversation with Adam Brant allows the reader to see another view of the Mannon family, that is, the family's lack of charity. Furthermore, in conjunction with the ancient myth, we hear of Brant's desire for revenge and his deep-seated grudge against the Mannons for the wrongs they had done to his mother.

Part OneAct II

*Summary*

In Ezra Mannon's study, Lavinia confronts her mother and accuses her of committing adultery with Adam Brant. When Christine tries to deny it, Lavinia tells how she had followed her mother to a cheap boardinghouse room in New York and overheard them making love to each other. Christine admits her guilt, justifying her behavior by explaining how awful it is to have to give her body to a man she hates as much as she hates Ezra Mannon.

Lavinia is horrified by her mother's confession and expresses the hatred she feels for her. Christine explains that she tried to love Lavinia, but could not because her daughter reminds her of the unpleasant episodes between her and her husband. Because her

husband was away at the time of her son's birth, Christine always felt that Orin belonged only to her.

Lavinia tries to shame her mother by revealing that Adam Brant is actually the son of Marie Brantome, but Christine admits that she has known this all along. Lavinia wants to see Christine punished for her sins, but decides that her first duty is to her father. Therefore, she tells her mother that she will keep quiet if Christine will give up Brant and become a dutiful wife to Ezra Mannon. Christine accuses Lavinia of being in love with Brant, which Lavinia

denies; Christine also accuses Lavinia of trying to be a mother to her brother Orin and a wife to her father. But in the end, Christine agrees to Lavinia's demands, even though she warns Lavinia not to push her too far. Lavinia instructs Christine to call Brant inside and get rid of him within thirty minutes.

When Brant arrives, he discovers that Lavinia knows of the love between him and Christine. They wonder what to do, and Christine feels that if Brant really loves her, he would not stand by and let another man return to her bed. Furthermore, if they killed Ezra Mannon, Adam could have Christine's share of the inheritance, which is rightfully his. Brant thinks poisoning is an unmanly method, but Christine convinces him that this is the only way. Brant is to buy some poison down by the waterfront and bring it to Christine. It has already been rumored that Ezra Mannon has serious heart trouble; therefore, his death will be believed to be the result of a heart attack caused by the excitement of returning home.

After Adam Brant leaves, Christine gloats that she now has control over her younger lover. He will not dare leave her even when she grows old and loses her beauty.

*Commentary*

The setting of this scene is against old furniture and a dull gray and flat-white interior. The dullness of the color stands out in dramatic contrast to the scene's bitter, passionate emotions. The room is the private study of Ezra Mannon. When Lavinia gets ready to accuse her mother of adultery in her father's name, she purposely sits in his chair in this imposing room. Lavinia acts in

her father's stead, attempting to emulate his actions by utilizing his private study. Since Christine hates Ezra Mannon, this room stands for all the coldness and bitterness connected with the man himself. There is a picture of Ezra Mannon hanging on the wall which has "the same strange semblance of a life-like mask that we have already seen in the faces of his wife and daughter and Brant." This mask emphasizes that the members of the family do not communicate their innermost thoughts and desires to each other.

When Lavinia accuses her mother, we see the other side of Lavinia's character. Previous to this, she has been hard and

unbending, showing no sign of weakness. When she makes the accusation, she is bitter and strong. However, when Christine says she hated giving her body to a man she did not love, Lavinia breaks in and orders her to stop telling such things. This reveals Lavinia's Electra complex about her father; she is unprepared for the knowledge of physical sex between Christine and her father. She cannot face the very basic point that her mother and father have slept together, having a relationship that is denied to Lavinia.

This accusation scene also correlates the relationship between Christine and her children with the circumstances surrounding the birth of each child. When Lavinia was born, Christine could not forgive Ezra Mannon for his coldness and distance, and Lavinia became a symbol of the disappointed love between the husband and wife. But when the son Orin was born, Ezra Mannon was away at war, and Christine felt that her son belonged only to her. Consequently, these facts contribute to an understanding of the development of the Electra and Oedipus complexes found in the family relationships.

The love-hate theme is reintroduced when Christine accuses Lavinia of wanting Adam Brant for herself. This is partially true, because in the Electra complex, the daughter would be jealous of anything the mother possessed. Later we see that Lavinia is tremendously attracted to Brant. The fact that Brant resembles both Orin and Ezra Mannon makes it more likely that this attraction could develop. In this same scene, Christine accuses Lavinia of trying "to become the wife of your father and the mother of Orin. You've always schemed to steal my place." Some

critics object to this scene because they feel that Christine is being too perceptive and that actually this is O'Neill and not Christine speaking. However, we are dealing with highly educated people who are aware of all sorts of subtleties. It seems no more unlikely for Christine to be aware of this than the fact that she can't love her daughter and also knows why she can't love her.

Other critics object to the play because it expresses these complexes too openly and makes the analogies to the Greek myth too obvious. But these critics are objecting because they assume

the sole or main purpose of the play is to make these analogies. O'Neill openly uses the Greek myth; as the title suggests, he wants the audience to be completely aware of every facet of the analogy. Thus, it is not his intent to be highly subtle in presenting this correspondence; instead, he wants to establish it so as to go more deeply into an investigation of his other themes and ideas.

At the end of their scene, Christine warns Lavinia that if her daughter goes too far she will be partly responsible for anything that happens. This alludes to Christine's plotting Ezra Mannon's death, forced to this act by Lavinia's strict demands.

The love-hate theme is brought in again with Christine and Brant. First he wonders if Christine fell in love with him because he resembled Ezra Mannon. Christine denies this and asserts that Brant resembles Orin, who does not resemble Ezra. But we have already been informed several times in the play that Orin and Ezra and Brant all resemble one another; thus, Christine has deluded herself and what she hates in one person, she loves in another, only slightly differently. Brant expresses the same idea. When he first met Christine, he hated her, and only wanted to use her to effect his revenge on Ezra Mannon. But as he says: "Out of that hatred my love came." For further meanings of this paradox, the student should see some of the works of August Strindberg and Sigmund Freud.

Christine and Adam Brant are able to plan the murder without fear because Christine feels that no one would ever suspect a Mannon of such a crime. Therefore, like her counterpart in the Greek tragedy, she uses her position in order to commit a heinous crime.

At first, Brant has what Christine calls "romantic scruples" about poisoning Mannon because that seems such a sneaking way to get revenge. But it is Christine who ridicules him for such absurd scruples, since revenge is the main thing and only by poisoning can they both escape any type of punishment. Christine's closing lines reveal that she wants to use collaboration in order to hold Brant after she is old and ugly. With this thought, we now realize that

Lavinia's taunt has affected Christine to the degree that she is taking drastic measures against losing Brant.

Part OneAct III

*Summary*

A week later, Lavinia is seen sitting on the steps waiting, when Seth comes and Lavinia questions him more about Marie Brantome. Seth tells her that Marie was free and wild like an animal but that everyone, including Lavinia's father, was attracted to her. When Seth leaves, Christine appears and hears from her daughter that Ezra Mannon might come that very night.

While the two women are arguing, Mannon quietly appears. Lavinia throws herself at him so enthusiastically that the father is somewhat taken aback. Christine's greeting is somewhat more reserved, and she soon inquires about her son Orin. Mannon explains that he was wounded slightly, but is getting along fine now. Orin received his wound by performing a brave act during combat, and Mannon is proud that he has removed some of Christine's babying influence from Orin.

After some more casual conversation, Christine suggests that Mannon retire for the evening. Lavinia tries to prevent them from going because she wants to be with her father for a longer time. Mannon is tired, but Lavinia holds him by mentioning Captain Brant. Mannon had heard earlier about him from Lavinia, and he questions Christine about Brant. There is a short argument between Lavinia and Christine, but Mannon forbids it to continue. He sends Lavinia to bed and remains for a moment with Christine. He begins to question her more about this Adam

Brant, but Christine becomes defensive and explains that Brant came only for Lavinia's sake. Mannon apologizes and tries to explain how much he has missed Christine. He tries to touch her, but she instinctively draws back, then realizes her mistake and apologizes, claiming that she feels nervous.

Mannon explains to his wife that during the war he saw so much of death that now he would like a little life. Previously, he

had undertaken all sorts of duties in the hopes of fulfilling his life, but now he realizes that what he needs most is to open himself and be honest with his wife. He hopes that she will do the same thing. He promises her that if she will give him a chance, she will find that he has changed significantly. As he takes Christine in his arms and kisses her, the door opens and Lavinia intrudes upon the scene. She cringes at the sight of her parents embracing, and is somewhat reprimanded by her father. She explains that she was not sleepy and only wanted to walk for a while. Christine and Mannon go in and Lavinia can hardly hold in her hatred for her mother. Then she feels it is her duty to tell her father about Adam Brant and calls to him, but when he answers she just tells him good-night.

*Commentary*

Lavinia's pride is further revealed in the first scene with Seth because even though she has found out the connection between Brant and Marie Brantome, she tells Seth that there is no connection. She cannot bring herself to reveal her plans to a servant, even though that servant is quite loyal to the Mannon family. But at the same time, Lavinia questions Seth about Marie Brantome's personality and hears that she was free and wild and well liked. In a sense, we see the same wildness and freedom in the actions of Christine Mannon. In typical fashion, Lavinia believes everything that Seth tells her, except the fact that Lavinia's father was also attracted to Marie Brantome.

When Christine appears, she and Lavinia immediately begin to argue, and Christine takes delight in wondering if Lavinia might be waiting for her father and she even refers to Mannon as

Lavinia's beau. Again, this small reference demonstrates Christine's perception of her daughter's basic complex.

As with the other characters in the play, note that Mannon is also described as having a "mask-like look" on his face. But within a short time, he will try to dispose of this mask and open himself to his wife. In fact, the first description portrays him as "if he were continually withholding emotion" from his face. But the war has changed Ezra Mannon, and he wants to get on a sounder footing with his wife.

More so than in words, Lavinia reveals her true motives and complexes through her actions. She is constantly striving to attract her father's attention and tries to come between him and Christine. Furthermore, the subject of the unique family relationships comes up immediately when Mannon tells how he finally made Orin into a man when he got his son away from his mother's apron strings. Also, Mannon insists that Christine not try to baby him when he comes home. The mention of Orin opens another view of Christine's plans. Had Orin come home at the same time as did his father, it is highly possible that the murder would have never taken place. This idea will be more fully developed in the next play entitled the "The Hunted." The family relationship is stated quite specifically when Lavinia tells her father, "you are the only man I'll ever love."

It is highly ironic that Mannon has "made a man of Orin" because the first thing Orin will be confronted with is the murder of his father and the adult responsibility of facing it. Ultimately, then we can say that Mannon has made his son into a man so that the son will revenge him against Christine.

Mannon is the first person in the drama to remove the mask which hides his real emotions. He opens himself up to Christine and tells how their past life has been wrong. He recalls that he had turned to his daughter Vinnie for love, but that was unsatisfying. Then he turned to public office and became a public servant in order to forget how his personal life was a failure. Now after having lived with death so much during the war, Mannon wants to live and be free and open with his wife. Note that he too wants to go to some far-off place: "go off to

some island where we could be alone a while." One of the attractive things about Adam Brant is his adventures in faraway islands, but when Mannon mentions it, Christine is bored with the idea.

Mannon's confession to Christine tends to humanize him as a character. Previously, we heard how hard and indifferent he had been. But now, by making him more human, O'Neill causes the audience to have more sympathy for him. Consequently, this change in our view of Mannon causes us to regard his murder with more horror.

The final scene again shows Lavinia's neurotic complex as she fluctuates between respect for her father and her extreme jealousy of her mother. She is also troubled by the fact that Christine now possesses the father and she is left "out in the cold." Lavinia's desperation is seen when she calls to him but then changes her mind.

Part OneAct IV

*Summary*

In the Ezra Mannon bedroom, Christine can be observed quietly slipping from the bed. It is near daybreak. Ezra Mannon calls to her to light the lamp so that they can talk some more. Christine tries to change the subject by saying that she heard Lavinia until after two in the morning. Mannon has also heard her, but does not want to talk about Lavinia.

Mannon explains that ever since he has been home, he has felt that the house was not his. Even his bed is "waiting for someone to move it." He accuses Christine of waiting for him to die so she can be rid of him. He goads her so far that she tells him that she has never been his and, furthermore, that Adam Brant has been coming to see her and that she has gone to New York to see him. She even lets him know that Brant is Marie Brantome's son. Mannon is seized with fury, but Christine doesn't stop. She tells all the details about how Brant was kind and gentle to her and how much she loves him.

Mannon can take no more and tries to get up when he has a heart attack. He calls for his medicine and Christine pretends to get it from the cabinet, but instead takes a pill from her own pocket.

After he swallows it, he realizes that it is not his medicine and he calls aloud for Vinnie.

Lavinia, who has heard them arguing, comes almost immediately and is in time to hear her father say "She's guiltynot medicine." Lavinia accosts her mother, who confesses that she was goaded into telling about Adam Brant. She even blames Lavinia because Lavinia had made Mannon suspicious. As Christine is about to leave, she faints and the small box of pills falls from her

hands. When Lavinia discovers them, she is horrified and can only call to her father to tell her what to do.

*Commentary*

During the course of the act, we have moved from the exterior of the house into the bedroom, the most intimate place in the house and the place where the murder will take place. It is in this inner sanctum that both Christine and Mannon are honest with each other for the first time in their lives.

Mannon, hearing that Lavinia has been pacing the floor all night, realizes that he is loved by his daughter but not by his wife. His perception is noted in his realization that this is not his house and that someone is waiting for him. Furthermore, he knows that Christine gave him her body but nothing else. He tells her that she makes him feel a lustful beast and that he would feel cleaner if he had gone to a brothel.

Perhaps Christine has been waiting for this horrible accusation, because she uses it as an excuse to tell Mannon how much she is repulsed by him. When she sees that she is affecting him, she goes all the way and tells how Marie Brantome's son has been making love to her. This double realization is too much for the proud Mannon and it affects his heart. Christine is able to get the poison that Brant had earlier brought to her and administers it to him. But her strength ultimately fails her and she faints before she can destroy the incriminating evidence.

Lavinia's first accusation causes Christine to charge her with making Mannon suspicious by the letter she wrote. This idea cannot be completely dismissed, because we know that Christine

needed a way to get Mannon angry. But at the end of the scene, Lavinia knows that her mother has killed her father and her promise is for revenge in some way. The next plays see the acting out of Lavinia's revenge.

Part TwoAct I

*Summary*

Two days after Ezra Mannon's death, a few select people are leaving the Mannon household, discussing the qualities of Ezra

Mannon. Dr. Blake explains that his death was probably due to a heart attack. He had heard about Mannon's weak heart and from the symptoms Christine described, he is sure that the death was due to a heart attack. After the ladies leave, the doctor suggests that the return home and perhaps making love was what actually killed Mannon.

Christine appears on the front steps and is soon followed by Hazel Niles. Christine wonders if Hazel loves Orin and promises to help Hazel. But she also warns Hazel that they must work together to keep Orin from coming too much under Lavinia's influence. After a moment, they return to the inside of the house.

Orin, Peter Niles, and Lavinia arrive at the front steps. Lavinia sends Peter into the house so she can speak to Orin alone. She is surprised and shocked to find that Orin is not heavily grieved by his father's death, but Orin explains that he has seen so much death during the war that he is not sensitive to anyone's death, even his own. Orin then wonders about the rumors that a Captain Brant had been calling on their mother. He promises to run the man off the property if he shows up again. Lavinia takes this opportunity to warn Orin not to believe anything their mother tells him until she has had another chance to talk with him. At this time Christine appears, welcomes her son, and remains alone with Lavinia in order to question her daughter, but Lavinia stands stonily silent.

*Commentary*

This second play of the trilogy begins similarly to the first one with the first act taking place on the front steps (or exterior) of

the Mannon mansion, and also with a chorus of townspeople present, gossiping and commenting on the Mannon family. The house is still described as having a mask-like quality.

One significant difference between the two plays is in the dresses of Christine and Lavinia. In the first play Christine was always seen wearing a green dress, but now, she must wear black for the mourning period. Thus, since Lavinia wears black all the time, the resemblance to her mother is more pronounced than ever. This closer physical resemblance is in direct contrast to the bitter hatred that develops between mother and daughter.

The chorus serves little function except to allow the audience to note varying opinions of the Mannon household. However, through Dr. Blake's speech we do see that there is no suspicion about the cause of Mannon's death. Thus, Lavinia would have a difficult time proving that her mother did kill Ezra Mannon.

Hazel Niles returns to the scene so as to again emphasize the purity and innocence of the normal person in contrast to the neurotic complexity of the Mannons. Christine remembers a time long ago when she was as pure as Hazel is, but implies that the Mannon world has destroyed that innocence. Now, she is most anxious to have Hazel as a confederate against Lavinia.

With the arrival of Orin, O'Neill returns to his investigation of the sexual substructure of the American family. Orin strongly resembles both Ezra Mannon and Adam Brant, but has an oversensitive quality that makes him seem more like Brant than Mannon. Furthermore, he looks more like thirty than his twenty years, a fact which makes the love triangle more believable.

Orin is obsessed with the idea of death and therefore cannot mourn for his father on a realistic plane. Symbolically, he has always hated his father and subconsciously delights in the removal of a dreaded rival for his mother's love. But Orin's conflict cannot be so simply stated. Since Lavinia looks like her mother, he is also neurotically attracted to her; at the same time he fears her because Lavinia's actions, as should be noted several times throughout this play, resemble the authoritative manner of Ezra Mannon. Thus Orin is torn between love, prompted by Lavinia's resemblance to Christine and fear, prompted by her severe commands. Orin, controlled by his Oedipus complex,

cannot stand the idea that his mother has entertained another man in his absence. As he states to Lavinia: "By God, if he [Brant] dares come here again, I'll make him damned sorry he did." This conflict becomes more significant and evident in the next act when Orin and his mother have their long talk about Brant and Ezra Mannon.

In Christine's last speech with Lavinia, we see how hard and determined Lavinia can be and how unsure Christine is. She tries to

convince Lavinia that it would be useless to say anything to Orin, knowing that she is the weaker of the two; her daughter has all the Mannon strength.

Part TwoAct II

*Summary*

In the Mannon sitting room, Hazel and Christine sympathize with Orin because his father's death has ruined his homecoming. They pamper him, trying to make him comfortable, which he enjoys very much. Orin, however, feels that everything has changed, even his mother, whom he finds more beautiful but significantly different.

While they are talking, Lavinia comes to the door and orders Orin to come and see his father's body. Orin responds as though it were a military command, and then at his mother's instigation, postpones the visit for a few minutes. Peter and Hazel leave, and Orin wonders why his mother is suddenly so fond of Hazel. He fears that she is trying to get rid of him and inquires also why she has written only two letters in the last six months. He then questions her directly about "this Captain Brant who's been calling on you."

Christine defends herself by accusing Lavinia of telling lies in order to draw her father closer, whereas Christine only loves her son. Orin is impressed by this open declaration and confesses that he is not sorry that his father is dead. Christine then explains that Lavinia wrote those letters because she thought Brant was coming to court her when in reality, Brant was only trying to work himself into the Mannon family in order to become the

captain of one of the Mannon ships. Christine reveals that Lavinia is perhaps insane because she has accused her mother of murdering Ezra Mannon; but Orin can forgive Christine for murder, but not for associating with Brant.

Orin tells his mother of a recurring dream he had while in the army. He dreamed he was on a South Sea island with his mother, but was unable to find her, even though he could feel her presence all around him. Soon Lavinia comes in and reminds Orin that he must come and pay his respects to his father. When Orin leaves,

Christine calls to Lavinia and tells her that Orin is glad that Ezra Mannon is dead.

*Commentary*

As in the first act, O'Neill moves rapidly from the exterior of the house to the interior, where he examines the exact relationship of his characters.

Orin, like his father, immediately notices that everything has changed. It is as though both Ezra and Orin could sense a change in the house and in Christine. He tells his mother directly that she is quite different from what she used to be. This difference may result from Christine's discovery of love and freedom for the first time, or from her guilt over her relationships with Adam Brant.

Orin, left alone with Christine, shares the Mannon propensity for stating his feelings in the most direct way. He tries to make his mother jealous by pretending to be attracted to Hazel. Also, he tells Christine openly that she is his only girl. This uninhibited awareness of their relationship emphasizes how deeply the Oedipus complex is a part of Orin's basic nature, thus making his jealousy of Brant more vicious. The discussion also reveals how much Orin disliked his father and that he is unable to grieve over his death. He could forgive Christine for murder, but not for associating with Adam Brant. He reminds her that the war has taught him how to kill and he could easily put his knowledge into practice.

The difficult point for Christine is how will she be able to leave Orin now for Brant. We are led to believe that if Orin had not gone off to war, then Christine would never have been attracted

to Brant. In other words, part of her original attraction was the fact that Brant resembled Orin so strongly. Now that Orin is back it will be more difficult for her to leave him.

Another resemblance between the Mannon men and Brant lies in the mention of the golden South Sea islands and the need to escape to such an island. Originally, Brant had told Christine and Lavinia about just such islands, and when Ezra came home, he wanted to escape to some island with Christine. Now Orin tells

about a recurring dream wherein he is on some South Sea island with his mother but is never able to find her, even though he feels her presence all around. In Freudian psychology, this is a prenatal reversion dream when the adult mind reverts back to the protection provided by the mother's womb, or as Orin states it, "those islands came to mean everything that wasn't war, everything that was peace and warmth and security." Thus, the islands mean escape, romance, security, lust, and peace according to the person describing the island.

More Freudian psychology is used here when Orin laughs about the times he and his mother would play games, and when they were caught, they would be scolded. This is a reference to the Freudian triangle involved in the Oedipus complex, where the son is always in conflict with the father. This idea is further developed in the next two acts when Orin tells of his recurrent dreams.

As with the first act, this act ends with Christine confronting her daughter about Orin. But as earlier, Christine is on unsure ground and is frightened of what Lavinia might do. Note that Lavinia's attitude and posture is like that of a Mannon rather than like that of her mother.

Part TwoAct III

*Summary*

Orin enters Ezra Mannon's study, where Ezra's body is laid out, approaches the bier, and tells his father that he has seen too much of death to be bothered by this death. Lavinia comes in and reprimands Orin for a lack of respect, but Orin explains that in

war one gets used to death and cannot hold it in such high respect. He explains that his act of courage was absurd and insane and only his father chose to view it as heroic. Although he killed two men, he later dreamed that he was killing the same man over and over, and each time the man looked like his father.

Before Lavinia can accuse Christine, Orin warns her that he will not tolerate any lies, but Lavinia simply points out that she has never lied to him. She then shows him the pills she found after her

father died, saying that her father had accused Christine of murder. Although Orin refuses to believe any of this, Lavinia prods him to punish their mother's lover. Lavinia describes the scene she overheard in New York between Adam and Christine. Orin becomes incensed and demands that Lavinia prove her accusation. Lavinia will prove her accusation only if Orin promises to punish the guilty. Orin swears to kill Adam Brant if what Lavinia says is true.

When Christine knocks at the door, Lavinia convinces him to pretend that he agrees with Christine and in that way they will be able to catch her off guard later. Christine enters and pleads with Orin to protect her from Lavinia. He promises to look after her, but is visibly upset when Christine sees the box of poison pills lying on Ezra Mannon's corpse. Orin cannot stand it any longer and flees from the room. Lavinia quietly asks her mother if Adam Brant bought the pills for her. Lavinia leaves and Christine pleads with the dead Ezra not to let anything happen to Adam Brant.

*Commentary*

In both plays Lavinia accuses her mother in her father's study. Likewise, in the presence of his body, she reminds Orin of his duty to revenge their father's death.

Orin most clearly expresses O'Neill's naturalistic views when he talks with his father's body. He sees death as just another corpse and another part of the natural process of living and dying. Orin mentions that he has seen hillsides covered with dead bodies and they "meant nothingnothing but a dirty joke like plays on life."

Orin also feels that he and his father can now be friends, since he is dead; his father "looks so strangely familiarthe same familiar stranger I've never known." Aside from the interesting word play, Orin's statement implies that he has never really known his father and has lived with him as with a stranger.

In telling about his dream, Orin feels that every night he kills the same person, who has Ezra Mannon's face. This is again a manifestation of the Oedipus complex, wherein each male child desires to kill his father in order to remove the dreaded rival for his mother's love.

Orin also dispells any illusion about his heroic actions. He lets Lavinia know that he was virtually insane at the time he led the attack and simply didn't know what he was doing. According to a naturalist like O'Neill, the concept of courage is false and occurs only in moments of insanity.

The Lavinia-Orin scene best illustrates that the Mannon family lives by its sexual nature rather than by its moral nature. Previously, we have seen that Lavinia can stand anything except the thought of her father making love to Christine. This one physical act was more than she could tolerate. Also with Orin, we see that he could accept the fact that his mother murdered his father, but could not tolerate the idea that Christine might have made love with Adam Brant. Thus, the nature of the Mannons is more influenced by their sexual nature than by any moral code. This idea is taken almost directly from the early studies of Sigmund Freud, who maintained that most of man's basic drives are of a sexual nature, or are influenced by man's sexual urges. O'Neill accepted these psychological findings as scientific and utilized them in describing his characters' motivations.

In the final scene when Orin watches his mother cringe before the poison pill box, he strongly suspects that Lavinia's story is true. He even says that "I should never have come back to lifefrom my island of peace! . . . But that's lost now! You're my lost island, aren't you, Mother?" Thus, at the end all Christine can do is plead with the dead body for the protection of her lover.

## Part TwoAct IV

### *Summary*

Alongside the wharf, a chantyman is heard singing "Shenandoah" and talking to himself. Brant appears and gives him some money to buy more drink and then orders him to be gone. After he leaves, Brant bemoans the fact that he hid behind a woman's skirts in order to get revenge on the Mannons. At this time, Christine appears out of the night dressed in black. She tells him immediately that Lavinia knows about everything, but at present both Orin and Lavinia are off visiting some mutual friends. She assures Brant that Orin only thinks that Lavinia is mad for making such wild accusations. Brant feels that they should not talk outside and leads Christine below.

After Brant and Christine disappear, Orin and Lavinia appear and approach the cabin skylight, where they can overhear the conversation between Brant and Christine. In a few minutes, the lights come on in the cabin and Christine is explaining how Ezra while dying pointed a finger at her and accused her of murder. Christine says that they must plan something, and Brant tells how he will take passage on a boat that is sailing in two days. They will go to some island and establish a life for themselves. Christine finds this wonderful and strange because she recalls that Orin was also mentioning an island somewhere. They assure each other that they will find happiness, and Brant escorts Christine out by the front way.

While Brant is gone, Orin and Lavinia enter the cabin. Orin is furious because Brant has been kissing Christine and promising to take her to his island. When Brant returns, Orin steps quietly up to him and shoots. Lavinia then instructs him to tear up the stateroom to make it look like the work of thieves. When Orin finishes, he bends over to look at Brant's body and notices a queer resemblance. He tells Lavinia that this is the face of the man he has killed over and over in his dreams; he also feels that if he had been in Brant's place, he would have killed Ezra Mannon for the sake of Christine's love.

*Commentary*

The song of the chantyman is the same song sung by Seth at the beginning of the play and serves to emphasize the ironic shifting of events within such a short period of time. Brant's handling of the chantyman shows him to be quite knowledgeable in dealings

with men of the sea. This is mentioned because he will soon have to give up the sea.

If we remember that the title of this particular play is "The Hunted," we then see that Brant's actions in the beginning of this act remind one of a hunted animal. Furthermore, Christine appears with the "dishevelled touch of the fugitive." They immediately retreat from the possible public eye and retire to the secrecy of the cabin. As soon as they retire, we see that they are being pursued like hunted animals by Lavinia and Orin, who appear and will listen to the conversation between Christine and Brant.

In the cabin, Christine explains that she had planned everything "so carefullybut something made things happen." This expresses in part the deterministic philosophy of many of O'Neill's plays, that is, man is not in control of his actions and is governed by some force which brings about actions sometimes contrary to man's desires. Thus, Christine and Brant must now make new plans, and they both realize that Brant must give up the sea. They intend to escape to some South Sea island and live there in peace and quiet.

Orin's hatred is intensified by hearing Christine mention the islands because he had dreamed earlier that he and his mother would go to just such a place. Consequently, in terms of the Oedipus complex, the son is being replaced by a lover and also his dreams of peace among the islands are being usurped by the same lover. This gives him all the strength he needs to perform the murder.

After the murder, the complexes of the two children are again emphasized. Lavinia wonders how Brant could ever love that vile woman, but Orin feels that if he had been Brant, he would have loved Christine in the same way. As Orin looks at Brant, he sees the strong family resemblance and recognizes that this is the face of the man that he has killed so many times in his dreams. Psychologically, Orin has been killing his mother's lover or the rival for his mother's love, whether it was his father or Adam Brant. This Freudian concept is given more validity, since Ezra Mannon and Adam Brant have such a strong physical resemblance or family likeness.

Part TwoAct V

*Summary*

The following night, Christine has called on Hazel to come to the Mannon house to keep her company. Christine is very morbid and tells Hazel that once she believed in heaven, but now knows that there is only hell. She asks Hazel to spend the night with her because she is frightened to sleep alone in the house, and Lavinia and Orin are away on a visit. Hazel leaves to go home and make the necessary preparations.

Almost immediately, Lavinia and Orin enter and tell their mother that they did not go visiting but went to Boston and watched her call on her lover. Orin brutally tells her that he has killed Adam Brant and shows her the paper where the police believe that some waterfront thieves performed the murder. He promises to make her forget Adam Brant and that he will take her away to some islands where they will live together. As he pleads with his mother for understanding, Lavinia becomes disgusted and orders him to go inside the house.

Lavinia addresses her mother, who remains in total and stunned silence, and tells her that what was done was justice. She tells Christine to forget Brant. Christine remains in frozen silence, then rushes into the house. In a few minutes a loud pistol shot is heard and Orin runs out calling for a doctor, but he knows it is too lateChristine has killed herself. Orin now frantically blames himself, wishing that he had let his mother think that waterfront thieves had actually killed Brant. He feels directly responsible for his beloved mother's death. Lavinia tries to console him by telling him that he still has her. She then sends Seth to fetch the doctor and to tell him that Christine killed herself in a "fit of insane grief over" Ezra Mannon's death.

*Commentary*

The opening scene between Hazel and Christine serves to prepare the audience for the horror of the revelation. Christine believes that she is safe because she thinks Lavinia and Orin have been visiting friends. She has no knowledge that they actually followed her and she has no knowledge of the death of Adam Brant.

All of Orin's fury in announcing the death of Brant is directed against Brant as a lover. Lavinia wanted the revenge because of her father's death, but Orin's only concern was with his mother's betrayal. He throws it up to her that she was about to accompany Brant to the islands. He then promises to take his mother to these islands where he would make her forget. Thus, the murder was performed to remove a dreaded rival, and Orin hopes to become again the sole possessor of his mother's love.

Since Orin is the only male Mannon left, Lavinia must now vie for his love with Christine. Thus, as Orin pleads with his mother to forget Brant, Lavinia becomes disgusted and orders him in the house. Again, she uses their father's commanding tone, and Orin instinctively obeys, because he is so emotionally distraught that he can no longer function on his own.

After Orin leaves, Lavinia tries to tell her mother that their act was one of justice, but Christine only stares blankly. In the first play, Christine had begged for mercy, now she knows that life is merciless and only glares at her daughter with savage hatred. As she leaves, Lavinia knows that Christine will kill herself and she only reasserts that hers was an act of justice. However, the audience knows that murder performed by the individual is not an act of justice. Only in terms of proper functioning under law can there be justice. Instead, Lavinia's act is performed out of her love for her father and her hatred for her motheremotions which blind her to the proper functioning of justice. Consequently, she can only stand "square shouldered and stiff like a grim sentinel in black."

Most of the significant action of the play has taken place in Ezra Mannon's study; thus, Christine goes there in order to commit suicide. This same study will be the place of Orin's suicide in the next act.

At the end of the play, we see that Orin assumes the responsibility for his mother's death. This assumption of guilt is the force which plagues him throughout the final play of the trilogy. His assumption of guilt also helps O'Neill to conform

with the original Greek trilogy, in which Orestes actually does kill his mother.

## Part ThreeAct I
## Scene I

*Summary*

A year later, Seth and some of his friends are drinking on the front steps of the Mannon house, which is unoccupied. Seth has a bet with Abner Small, one of the townspeople, that Abner will not go into the house and remain among the ghosts until midnight. Seth

lets Abner into the house, when Seth comes out, he tells the others that he doesn't really believe in ghosts but still, there is something queer about this house"like somethin' rottin' in the walls."

Peter and Hazel arrive just as Abner Small comes running out of the house, claiming that he has seen a ghost. Seth explains what he was doing to Peter and Hazel. He then learns that Lavinia and Orin have arrived in New York and will return home the next day. They had gone to the South Seas about a year ago, shortly after Christine committed suicide. Hazel and Peter tell Seth to come help them open up the house. They go inside to let fresh air into the house.

In a few minutes, Lavinia and Orin appear. She has to force her brother toward the house, telling him that he has to face it. She asks him directly if he sees any ghosts now, and he mechanically answers no. Lavinia says that the dead have forgotten them, and that they must forget the dead.

*Commentary*

Over a year has elapsed since the death of Christine and we learn that Lavinia and Orin have been to the "blessed South Sea Islands." But we soon learn that this was no solution, because the islands belong more to Brant than they do to Orin. Furthermore, the blissful island of peace can never belong to the Mannons because they must return to face the old ghosts left in the house.

Note that each of the three plays begins with the exterior of the house and moves toward the interior, and each begins with some

type of townspeople representing a chorus or "human background for the drama of the Mannons."

As in the original Greek myth, in which Orestes is pursued by the Furies, Orin is going to be pursued by the ghosts and memories of the past. The idea of the ghosts haunting the walls of the Mannon house is the dominant theme throughout this last play. It opens on a more humorous consideration of this idea by having Seth wager that Abner Small cannot remain in the house until midnight. The fact that Abner loses his bet emphasizes the abstract force connected with the Mannons.

The theme of the ghost is carried over into the conversation between Seth and the Nileses. Seth explains "there's been evil in that house since it was first built in hateand it's kept growin' there ever since." Even Hazel has compunctions about entering the house, but she feels too much involved with Orin's life to stay away.

When Lavinia and Orin appear, we immediately notice that they have assumed the position earlier occupied by their mother and father. Lavinia now wears green and combs her hair the way that Christine earlier did. Likewise, Orin now has a mustache, which heightens his resemblance to Ezra Mannon. But it is not just in the physical appearance that the children now look like the parents but also in their actions. Lavinia is more free and moves more gracefully; she has lost the stiffness and sense of determination that marked her presence in the earlier plays. Likewise, Orin has lost some of his quickness and is now more stiff and wooden-like. He is grave and hard, as the Mannons have always been. Some critics believe that O'Neill has exaggerated this adoption by the children of the characteristics of the parents in order to round out his Freudian interpretation of the fate of the Mannon family. This idea is further developed in the next acts.

The ghost motif reappears in Orin and Lavinia's conversation as she asks him if he sees any ghosts. We are told that they return home so that Orin can face his ghosts and overcome them. At the end of the act Lavinia tells him that the dead have forgotten them and that they must forget the dead. But we will see that Orin

cannot escape from the dead and will be constantly haunted by them.

## Part ThreeAct I
## Scene 2

*Summary*

Lavinia enters the sitting room of the Mannon house and orders Orin to follow her. He has been waiting for his mother to appear to him, but he mourns that she is gone forever. Lavinia commands him to quit being morbid. They must, with Peter's and Hazel's help, get back to some "simple normal things."

Orin tells Lavinia that she has come to look amazingly like Christine, not only in looks but also in the way she behaves, "as if

her death had set you freeto become her." Lavinia reproaches him because he had promised that he would be over his morbid spells once they arrived home. She then makes Orin recite that Christine was a murderess and an adulteress and that she chose to end her life as a punishment for her crime. Orin repeats it but apparently does not believe it or care what he is saying.

Peter enters unexpectedly and is taken aback by Lavinia's strong resemblance to Christine: for a minute, Peter thought he was seeing a ghost. He recovers and compliments her on her changed looks and colored dress. Orin interrupts and asks Peter if he knows why Lavinia is wearing their mother's colors. He hints that Lavinia enjoyed the naked men on the South Sea islands and became rather free with them. Lavinia gets rid of Orin and rationalizes his behavior by explaining that he has undergone too many shocks during the war and also the traumas of his parents' deaths. She immediately wants to know if Peter still loves her and lets him know that she is ready to marry him at any time. She explains that the islands set her free in that she now appreciates the value of Peter's love. She explains that Orin is so upset because he had a serious argument with his mother just before she committed suicide and he has felt responsible ever since. Orin returns with Hazel in time to see Lavinia embracing Peter and says something threateningly, but then with a ghastly smile offers congratulations to them.

*Commentary*

The emphasis throughout this scene is on Lavinia's changed appearance. Now that she is no longer in competition with her mother, she goes one step further and steals all of Christine's

colors and mannerisms. Furthermore, Orin has become much more like his fatherhe now carries himself stiff and hard like the Mannons. And also like the parents they now resemble, Lavinia is determined to find love and happiness, but Orin is equally determined that she shall not escape him and the retribution that the Mannons demand.

The similarity is carried further when Peter enters and thinks that he is seeing the ghost of Christine. We recall the idea of the ghosts which Orin and Lavinia have returned to face, and now we see that Lavinia is dressed like one of the ghosts.

Peter and Hazel's function became clearer in this act: they are to help Orin and Lavinia get back to a simple, normal life. All the way through this drama, they represent the everyday life of the average person as contrasted to the bizarre life of the Mannons.

This act also gives further proof that Lavinia was in love with Adam Brant. On the islands which he always talked about, Lavinia becomes for the first time a free and open person. She becomes, as noted above, a replica of her mother, and devotes herself to enjoying and loving life. We also hear that she flirted with the ship's captain who, according to Orin, reminded her of Adam Brant.

Ultimately, in terms of this last play, Orin's remarks to Lavinia, which seem so innocent, function to implant a seed of doubt in her mind. Accordingly, at the end of the play, Peter becomes suspicious and makes Lavinia realize that a normal life is not for her. She tries to cover for anything he might say by explaining that Orin and Christine had a serious argument just before Christine committed suicide.

Part ThreeAct II

*Summary*

Orin is in his father's study writing out the history of the Mannon family when Lavinia demands to be let in. He hides his manuscript and opens the door. She reproaches him for hiding so much in the dark room, which he keeps locked. Orin feels that he can best perform his job in the darkness and shadows.

Orin wonders why Lavinia will never leave him alone with Hazel

now that he and Hazel are engaged. Lavinia tells him that she is afraid that he might say something revealing, especially since he has been acting so strangely lately. But Orin refers to Hazel as another lost island and he will not be able to escape from his ghosts by marrying her; furthermore, he warns Lavinia that she cannot escape her "retribution." Fearing she will leave him for Peter, he threatens her with his true history of the family that would destroy them both. The only thing that is missing from the history is the final chapterswhat will happen to Lavinia. He tells her that he

has found her the most interesting criminal of all the Mannons. When Lavinia objects, he confronts her directly with her role in Christine's death. He accuses her of being jealous of her mother and of wanting Brant for herself.

Orin then questions Lavinia about her activities with the native on the South Sea island. She admits that she kissed him and if she did more than that she had a right to love. Orin threatens to kill her and then pleads with her to deny what she has just said. Lavinia does retract, but warns Orin that she can't tolerate many more accusations. He reminds her that they are now in their parents' place and that she is forever chained to him; Lavinia refuses to accept this and warns Orin that he would be responsible if something happens. Orin now realizes that Lavinia hopes for his death, but Lavinia in a moment of regret, breaks down and begins to cry while Orin comforts her, saying, "the damned don't cry."

*Commentary*

As with many of the central scenes in the play, this scene takes place in the Ezra Mannon study. We must remember that in the first play Lavinia uses this room to accuse her mother of adultery, in the second play Lavinia reveals her mother's crimes to Orin in the study, and it is also in the study that Christine commits suicide. In this play, Orin accuses Lavinia in the study. This is highly appropriate, since Orin has assumed his father's role, and Lavinia has become the free person like her mother.

Orin, in writing the Mannon history, has chosen to do so in darkness, emphasizing the horror and blackness of the Mannon

crimes. This is also an indication of Lavinia's ultimate fate, that is, to be locked up in darkness with all the Mannon ghosts.

During the two months that have elapsed since Lavinia and Orin have returned, we find that he and Hazel have become engaged but Lavinia will never leave them alone. She, of course, is frightened of what he will reveal if left alone. The engagement, we are led to believe, was also part of Lavinia's plan to try to establish a normal life for herself and Orin. But Orin sees it as an attempt to reject him in the same way that Christine had rejected him. He threatens

Lavinia that if she attempts to leave him, he will reveal the history of the Mannon family which he has been writing and then no man will marry her.

Orin reveals that he is strangely attracted to Hazel, but this is because Hazel is a representative of the pure and innocent world which is forever lost to the Mannons. Like Christine, he sees Hazel as "another lost island." Orin, by this time, is aware that destiny has not created a simple or happy life for the Mannons.

The above realization leads Orin to tell Lavinia that he finds her the most interesting of all the Mannon criminals. The history is an attempt to find out what "evil destiny" has brought their lives to this present position, but he runs into a stumbling block trying to predict what fate there is for Lavinia. Orin now sees Lavinia as the worse criminal. She committed crimes out of premeditated jealousy, whereas Orin's crime was in a fit of passion caused by jealousy. Among the Mannon ghosts he finally comes to realize that Lavinia's desire for the murder was based on "jealous hatred."

When Orin accuses Lavinia of having an affair with an island native, Lavinia defends herself by saying "I have a right to love." This was the same defense that Christine made to Lavinia when she was accused of adultery. Thus, Lavinia not only adopts her mother's colors and personality, but also her need and justification for love. But since Orin adopts his father's position, he must avenge such a dishonor. However, there is more at work here, for Lavinia is also functioning in Christine's place; Orin cannot tolerate either Christine or Lavinia giving themselves to

another man. He therefore pleads with Lavinia to deny her statements.

As Christine once warned Lavinia not to go too far or else she would be responsible if something happened to Ezra, now Lavinia delivers the same warning to Orin, but he understands her more completely than Christine understood Lavinia. Thus, he temporarily breaks Lavinia by pointing out the meaning of her threat. At the end he comforts her by saying that "the damned don't cry." Thus, Orin sees clearly that the two remaining members of the Mannon family are damned; it takes Lavinia two more acts to accept this.

Part ThreeAct III

*Summary*

Lavinia is alone in the house, thinking it would be better if Orin committed suicide. Seth enters and tells her that the possibility of seeing ghosts frightens the cook and that Lavinia must pacify her.

Hazel and Peter arrive. Hazel worries about the way Lavinia treats Orin, feeling that Lavinia is "A bad influence for Orin." The drastic change in Lavinia is frightening. When Orin comes in, Peter leaves for a meeting. As soon as Orin finds himself alone with Hazel he makes her promise to take his manuscript, hide it, and if something happens to him or if Lavinia ever tries to marry Peter, then she is to read what he has written and allow Peter to read it also. Hazel promises but wants Orin to promise to come for a visit alone at her house.

When Lavinia finds the two alone, she immediately becomes suspicious and is very sharp with Hazel. Orin reminds Hazel that she must go home, and while attempting to hide the manuscript from Lavinia, she falters just long enough for Lavinia to discover it. She promises Orin that she will do anything if he will make Hazel return it. Orin accepts this promise as binding, and after Hazel leaves, he suggests that now they have assumed their parents' place, Lavinia no longer seems like his sister. If they go further, then Lavinia will feel as damned as he does. This suggestion horrifies Lavinia, who wishes that Orin would be man enough to kill himself. Orin leaves, knowing that Lavinia

wants to drive him to suicide the same way that he drove Christine.

After Orin leaves, Peter enters and Lavinia tells him that she longs to live a simple life with him and wants him to love her always. While they are talking there is a gunshot in the study; Peter rushes in to investigate, and Lavinia quietly asks pardon from Orin.

*Commentary*

The ghost motif appears at the outset of this act. The pictures in the sitting room are described as possessing an intense bitterness.

Seth comes in to announce that the cook has been frightened again by the fear of ghosts in the house. The entire act is devoted to an investigation of Orin's attempts to come to terms with the past Mannons.

In the first play, Christine hoped for Ezra's death so as to set her free. Now that Lavinia has assumed her mother's colors and her role, she makes a similar wish. She feels that Orin would be better off if he would commit suicide. Both mother and daughter then hope for a greater freedom through the death of the man who keeps them tied down.

The appearance of Hazel indicates the change that can take place through close association with the Mannon family. Earlier she was depicted as the essence of natural innocence. Now she is nervous, disturbed, and confused. As she is being drawn into the Mannon family, she loses a degree of innocence which earlier contrasted with this family.

Orin's attempt to give Hazel his manuscript establishes the motivations for Peter's later distrust of Lavinia. Hazel, seeing that something is drastically wrong, will inform Peter so that in the final scene his suspicions make Lavinia realize that she can have no normal happiness.

In order to retrieve the manuscript, Lavinia promises to do anything. She is not aware of what Orin will ultimately suggest. When Orin hints at incest, Lavinia is shocked and calls her brother vile. This is the scene which O'Neill has been preparing for by having the two children adopt their parents' attributes. Thus, for Orin, since they have now become as their mother and

father were, it is only a short step to actual incest. Orin desires the incest not for lustful reasons, but to make Lavinia feel as damned as he does. Lavinia apparently has never been able to feel the tremendous guilt which has plagued Orin, and he now attempts to find some way to make her feel as tormented as he does. But Lavinia is the stronger person and only drives Orin to suicide.

As Orin goes to his death, he is at least aware of the importance that his mother attached to the love she had for Adam Brant. By forgiving her and wishing her happiness, he achieves a type of victory over Lavinia, who cannot go beyond her own immediate desires for revenge and for personal happiness. This is further indicated by her clinging to Peter at the end of the scene and her apparent lack of remorse for driving Orin to suicide. She is determined to live "in spite of the ghosts."

Part ThreeAct IV

*Summary*

In front of the Mannon house, Lavinia is picking flowers in order to dispel the "Hate and Death" in the Mannon house. Hazel arrives and accuses Lavinia of driving Orin to his death. She then tells Lavinia that Peter must be left out of this terrible business. Lavinia refuses to listen and is determined to marry Peter, even though Hazel has told him about the manuscript that Orin wanted him to read.

After Hazel leaves, Peter comes, and Lavinia soon discovers that he has quarreled with his mother and sister. Lavinia feels that she is coming in between Peter and his family. Peter swears that he does not suspect Lavinia in any way, but does wonder if there was "anything in what Orin wrote that would stop" them from being married. Lavinia realizes that the dead are trying to come between them and she asks Peter to kiss her and hold her close; as he does so, she unconsciously calls him Adam. She then realizes that it is no good pretending, and she tells him that Orin knew that she had had an affair with the native. Peter is

infuriated and leaves Lavinia, who tries to retract as he walks away.

Alone, Lavinia realizes that she can never escape the Mannons except by living with them. She orders Seth to have the house and shutters nailed shut, and she will live alone with the Mannon ghosts until the curse is avenged.

*Commentary*

In the original Greek myth, the curse was directed mainly against Orestes, who did commit the crime, and the curse was ended when Orestes was exonerated through his suffering. O'Neill changes this somewhat to make Lavinia the principal sinner and it is therefore the daughter who must continue to suffer.

This idea of the ghost interfering with their present lives is stated rather clearly when Hazel warns Lavinia that Peter knows of Orin's manuscript. Lavinia cries out "Why can't the dead die" but still refuses to yield to the forces represented by the ghosts. In fact, she asserts her determination when she refuses to ask God or anybody for forgiveness because she forgives herself.

With the arrival of Peter, Lavinia realizes finally that the dead will always come between her and any attempt to lead a normal life. Previously, Peter had been the simple and trusting man who devoted himself to Lavinia. Now she sees something suspicious in him. He has quarreled with his family and constantly wonders if there was something in Orin's manuscript that he should have read. Thus Lavinia knows that Peter will always wonder about the contents of Orin's manuscript and that she can never escape from the dead. This realization is made final when she passionately throws herself into Peter's arms, but momentarily forgets and calls him Adam. Therefore, returning to the original motivation for the death of Adam Brant, we now can assert with assurance that Lavinia loved him and had him killed out of jealous hatred.

In the end, Lavinia knows that the Mannon guilt is too great for

another suicide and she must face the dead ghosts as a living person willing to suffer. Thus the Mannon grief is now expressed in Lavinia's black dress and in her voluntary act of going on living with the dead. The play has shown the destruction of a family who could not control its sexual desires and motivations. The story told against the background of a Greek myth becomes more meaningful because the established values of the myth itself and the modern re-enactment imply that the modern man is more controlled by his sexual nature than by his concepts of right and wrong.

# Character Analyses

## Ezra Mannon

Ezra Mannon appears for only a short time in the first play. However, we hear enough about him from the other characters to know that he is the typical Mannon. The Mannons have been the dominant family around this New England village for over a hundred years, and if they have never been liked, they have always been feared and have always commanded respect. The various members of the past family are represented as being cold and stiff, filled with an intense hatred and fear of life. They hide behind a mask which conceals their essential nature.

Ezra Mannon lives in the house (temple of hatred0 built by his father out of a jealous rage because Ezra's uncle had seduced the French nurse Marie Brantome in the old home. It is later revealed that even Ezra himself was attracted to Marie, but later when she applied to him for help, he did not bother to answer her letter.

Like most of the Mannons, Ezra appears to wear a mask covering his own inner self. He has always been cold and distant, fearing to live freely or to express himself openly until he returns from the wars. Earlier, he had gone into politics only to cover up for the lack of inner peace and to conceal or make up for his loneliness. When he felt rejected by his wife, he turned to his daughter for love; however, he apparently never bothered much with his son Orin. Thus, his attitude toward his children is reflected directly in their development.

After returning from the war, where he had seen too much death and destruction, he tells his wife that he wants to live. For the first time in his life, he removes his mask and unveils his inner thoughts, but for Christine, it is too late. The love she once felt for him has turned into bitter hatred. Thus, when he accuses her of making him feel like a beast during sexual relations, she reveals that he had always been cold, making it impossible for anyone to respond to him.

Finally, Ezra Mannon is seen as the proud and distant man who, influenced by his family name, could never bring himself into any proper human relationship. His one effort was fumbling and awkward, coming after too many years of disdain and distance.

Christine Mannon

When she first met Ezra Mannon, she was attracted by his good looks and the proud way he carried himself. But after the marriage, she found it impossible to reach out to him and break through the mask he always wore. He would never relax and soon her love turned to hatred.

This change in Christine can be accounted for by her free and open nature and her desire and craving for love. Physically, she is described as a beautiful woman who looks much younger than her years. Furthermore, her looks resemble those of the French nurse, Marie Brantome.

When Lavinia was born, Christine was at her moment of intensest hatred for her husband and she saw in the child only a symbol of her dislike for Ezra; thus, she was never able to love her daughter and this accounts for the animosity between mother and daughter. In contrast, when Orin was born Ezra was in the Mexican war, enabling Christine to think that Orin belonged only to her. These two factors surrounding the birth of the children account in part for the complexes which O'Neill demonstrates throughout the play.

Christine's attraction to Adam Brant is in no way based upon a desire to revenge her slight at the hands of Ezra Mannon, but instead, she responds to him because she wants to live and feels

she has the right to love. She feels cheated in life and feels entitled to some degree of love and warmth. Adam, as a romantic captain of a clipper ship, provides this attraction. Furthermore, he is apparently honest with her from the very beginning by telling her that he is Marie Brantome's son. This honesty has always been missing from her relationship with Ezra Mannon. And finally, she is attracted to Adam because, according to her, he bears a strong resemblance to

Orin Mannon. In actuality, Adam Brant looks equally like Ezra Mannon, whom Christine hated.

Christine is not by nature a vicious woman. It is implied that if Orin had not been forced to go to war, she would have been content to live with the love given her by her son. But with him away, she turns to Adam Brant, who offers her all the attention that she has so long craved. When it is learned that Ezra Mannon is returning from the war, she cannot tolerate the idea of returning to the stiff, dead life of being his wife. She has touched the paradise of pleasure with Adam Brant, and it is beyond her to return to the giant Mannon prison. Therefore, she plots murder with the intent of freeing herself from bondage.

Christine's suicide suggests the depth of her response to Adam Brant. Upon learning of his death, she realizes that there is nothing left for her. So she commits suicide rather than face the empty shell of an existence. By her suicide, she escapes the fate reserved for the true Mannons and as Orin later says, she is now free on one of the beloved South Sea islands.

Lavinia Mannon

Lavinia is the counterpart of Electra in the ancient Greek myth. But whereas Electra brought about the murder of her mother in order to carry out the Greek concept of personal revenge, Lavinia is motivated by sexual jealousies.

The circumstances surrounding her birth foreshadow her future complexes. While Christine was carrying Lavinia, she had just begun to be disillusioned with her husband and by the time Lavinia was born, she had begun to hate Ezra Mannon. She

always saw in Lavinia the living proof of her intense dislike for her husband and could never give her love to her daughter Lavinia. Thus, Lavinia grew up with the realization that her own mother disliked her. Consequently, Lavinia had to turn to her father for love. This fatherly love was reciprocated, since Ezra Mannon also realized that his wife had grown cold to him. As a result of these circumstances, there developed the extremely close relationship between father and daughter which the famous Sigmund Freud labeled the Electra complex.

Physically, Lavinia resembles her mother very closely, but owing to her hatred for Christine, she intentionally emphasizes the dissimilarity between them in the first plays. Their hair and facial structures are almost identical, but Lavinia tries to groom her hair in a manner completely different from Christine's. Her intent was to distinguish herself from her mother and to look as much like a Mannon as possible, thus emulating her father and winning his approval. She always wore black, as opposed to Christine's vibrant green colors which set off her copper hair.

When Adam Brant appeared resembling both Ezra Mannon and Orin Mannon, he becomes the object of a contest between Christine and Lavinia. Actually, in the Electra complex carried to the extreme as we find it in Lavinia, the daughter is jealous of anything the mother possesses. Thus, Lavinia is attracted to Brant because he has a strong Mannon resemblance and yet hates him because he is attracted to Christine. Ultimately, Lavinia's demand that he be murdered is prompted by highly confused and complex motivations. She must revenge her beloved father but in doing so she is murdering the man she loves; however, in the process she is punishing her mother by destroying her lover.

Once the mother is dead, the daughter has the opportunity to become the things that were admirable in the mother. Consequently, in the year following Christine's death, Lavinia becomes more free, happy, and responsive than she had been earlier. She even "steals" her mother's green colors. But she fails to realize that as she becomes more like her mother, Orin becomes more like his father and ultimately demands from Lavinia the same things that Ezra had demanded from Christine.

This final adoption of the parents' characteristics emphasizes that Lavinia will never be allowed to actually become as free and as responsive as Christine had been. Thus, after Orin's death, she realizes that her nature has been determined by the Mannon crimes and she sees that her fiance Peter will never trust her. Therefore, she accepts the only role left to her: she returns to her black dress, assuming a role of eternal mourning. Death would be too easy for the crimes the Mannons have committed, instead she must receive her punishment by living with the ghosts of the Mannons.

Orin Mannon

Orin's Greek counterpart was Orestes, but O'Neill changed Orin's basic motivation so as to fit into the larger view of the Mannon family. In the original myth, Orestes grew up in a different land under the guidance of tutors and therefore did not have the opportunity to develop the Oedipus complex that we see in the modern Orin.

As with Lavinia, the circumstances surrounding Orin's birth also affect his future life. When Christine was carrying Orin and when he was born, Ezra Mannon was off in the Mexican War. Thus, at his birth, she felt that he belonged entirely to her. Throughout his early life, she always devoted herself to him and taught him to believe that he was more like his mother than like the Mannon side of the family. We even hear of games that Orin and his mother played against Ezra Mannon's approval. Coming back from the war and finding his wife so cold, Ezra Mannon then turns to his daughter and does not interfere too much with Orin and Christine. As a result, there developed the extremely close relationship between mother and son which Freud called the Oedipus complex.

Physically, Orin resembles his father in the same way that Lavinia resembles her mother. But we do know that once Christine loved Ezra for a short time; thus part of her attraction for her son is due to the fact that he is a Mannon whom she can control. Orin does not come into his own as an individual until he goes off to the wars. There we hear two conflicting reports of him. His father thought he performed a brave act, but Orin claims that he was wandering around out of his mind. What he

does learn during the war is how to kill and how to accept death. This prepares him for the revenge he will have to undertake against Adam Brant.

Orin's true nature is seen when he learns of his mother's entanglement with Adam Brant and of her guilt in Ezra Mannon's death. Rounding out his picture of the complexes, O'Neill makes it clear that Orin would not have judged his mother guilty even if he knew for certainty that she had murdered Ezra Mannon. The deciding point lies in the fact that Christine has replaced her son with

another man and this is what Orin cannot accept. He does not kill Adam Brant to revenge his father but to prevent Adam from leaving with Christine. Jealousy is the principal motivating force in Orin in the same way it is in Lavinia.

Orin cannot recover from the fact that his mother committed suicide. Ultimately he cannot even blame Adam Brant for loving her and states that he would have done the same thing. He tries to turn to Lavinia as a type of mother figure and tries to force her to yield to him. She, however, is stronger than he is and Orin's only out seems to be suicide in order to escape the haunting Mannon ghosts. In the final analysis he is the weaker of the two Mannon children, choosing escape rather than the morbid life destined for the family.

Adam Brant

Adam Brant is half Mannon but the other half is the "wild" French blood inherited from his mother, Marie Brantome. For him, the Mannon blood is the weak strain because his father had never been strong enough to oppose the other Mannons nor could he support the family by his own means, ultimately taking his life. Adam became a captain on a ship, and after learning of the circumstances involved in his mother's death, he vowed to revenge himself against the Mannon family.

At first he is attracted to Christine only so that he can gain his revenge against the Mannons. But he soon comes to see in Christine a free and open nature which responds to life and romance and excitement. Although Brant is not aware of it, Christine supposedly bears a strong resemblance to his mother,

Marie Brantome, both in physical appearance and in her actions. Consequently, his love has deeper motivations than mere attraction or revenge.

Brant is openly opposed to poisoning Ezra Mannon because this would not allow him the pleasure of seeing his enemy suffer. He feels it is the cowardly way out, but he allows himself to be convinced by Christine that poisoning is the only safe way. Consequently, he is ruled by a woman stronger than he.

Brant does possess a quality for strength because he has few qualms about giving up his career in order to go off with Christine, the woman he loves. It is this romantic quality which appeals to both Christine and Lavinia. Mainly, however, he functions as an instrument to advance the Mannon plot, and does not enter directly into the actions.

## Naturalism

O'Neill was one of the most famous exponents of a way of writing called "naturalism." This involved both a technique and a way of viewing life. Essentially, the literary concept of naturalism grew out of the concept of realism during the nineteenth century. The realist had wanted to "hold up a mirror to life" and render a very accurate picture of life. The naturalist wanted to go a step further and examine life as would a scientist. Thus the technique of the naturalist involves viewing life with scientific objectivity.

For the naturalist, man is controlled by basic urges and can do very little to determine his own destiny. Environmental, hereditary, and biological forces combine to control man's life. These basic and elemental urges place man in a position similar to that of animals. But O'Neill also accepted the psychological urges as a part of man's basic driving force.

In his plays, O'Neill shows characters being driven by forces which they cannot understand or conquer. A man born in one type of environment is influenced by concomitant forces to the point that his basic actions in life are governed by these

environmental forces. Carried to an extrene, the view leads to determinism, that is, the idea that man can do nothing for himself and is constantly at the mercy of forces outside himself. A typical image used by the naturalist is that of a person being trapped or being in a cage. In his earlier works, O'Neill often used the physical image of the cage (as in *The Hairy Ape*) to suggest the position of man caught or trapped in an alien and hostile universe.

In such a play as *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill depicts man as the victim of his elemental drives, which are motivated by the

environment, the biological need to survive, and the hereditary traits of the characters. Later, O'Neill accepted the findings of Sigmund Freud and utilized psychological forces as a part of man's inherent drives. Thus, in *Mourning Becomes Electra* O'Neill attempts to show how certain characters are dominated by their sexual drives, which cause them to commit crimes that repulse the ordinary person. In these plays, man becomes a victim of forces beyond his control whether these forces are environmental, psychological, or biological.

Naturalism as a dramatic form has some serious limitations. In the true sense of tragedy where man has the potential to control his destiny, the character becomes tragic in relation to how much he is in control of his fate. But in naturalism, man is incapable of controlling his destiny and so becomes the victim of greater forces.

The tragedy occurs when we consider the implications of these outside forces and the realization that man is trapped. We watch with a horrified sense of pathos man struggling against insurmountable obstacles. Consequently, the tragedy lies in man's awareness and in his consciousness of the futility of struggling against a blind fate.

## The Greek Myth

A generation before the Trojan War, two brothers, Atreus and Thyestes, contended for the throne of Argos. Thyestes seduced his brother's wife and was driven out of Argos by Atreus, who then established himself as sole king. Eventually Thyestes

returned and asked to be forgiven. Atreus pretended to be reconciled with his brother, but secretly planned to avenge the seduction of his wife and at the same time to eliminate a rival for the crown by rendering Thyestes unclean in the eyes of the citizens of Argos. Atreus murdered the two young sons of Thyestes, cut their bodies into unrecognizable pieces, and had them served to the father at a banquet given in honor of his return. Thyestes was horrified when he learned what he had dined on. He cursed Atreus and all his descendants, and fled from Argos with his only remaining child, the infant Aegisthus.

In some forms of the legend, Atreus fled from Argos alone and then sired a child (Aegisthus) by his own daughter. Aegisthus was brought up with the idea that he must revenge the atrocity perpetrated against his father.

When Atreus died, the throne of Argos was inherited by his son Agamemnon, who married Clytaemestra, the daughter of the king of Sparta. They had three childrenIphigenia, Electra, and Orestes. The other son of Atreus, Menelaus, married Helen, the sister of Clytaemestra, and in due course became the king of Sparta when her father died.

Most of the Greek chieftains had been among the suitors of Helen, for she was renowned to be the most beautiful woman in the world. They had made a pact to accept without protest her choice of a husband and to come to his aid if anyone attempted to steal Helen from him. Some time after Helen and Menelaus were married, Paris, the son of the king of Troy, came to Sparta. He seduced Helen and carried her back with him to Troy. Faithful to their oaths, the chieftains rallied with their armies to the call of Menelaus. A great force was mobilized to capture Troy and restore Helen to her rightful husband. Agamemnon, as leader of the largest contingent, was made commander.

The expedition assembled at Aulis, on the eastern coast of Greece, but was unable to sail for Troy because of adverse winds. Calchas, a soothsayer who accompanied the army, declared that the goddess Artemis was responsible and could only be appeased by the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia. Agamemnon was appalled by this command and refused to obey, but finally gave in to the pressure put on him by

the other chieftains. He induced Clytaemestra to send Iphigenia to Aulis by claiming that the maiden was to be married to Achilles, the greatest of the Greek heroes. When the young girl arrived at the camp, however, she was sacrificed to the goddess. After this the wind changed. The army boarded its ships and set sail for Troy.

Meanwhile, Aegisthus returned to Argos in the absence of Agamemnon. He began to plot against his cousin in the hope of

regaining what he considered to be his rightful place on the throne and of avenging the treatment his father and brothers received at the hands of Atreus. Aegisthus discovered that Clytaemestra had developed a bitter hatred for Agamemnon because of the sacrifice of her daughter. Her enmity for her husband continued to increase as she received reports of his infidelity with other women while on campaign to Troy. Before long Aegisthus and Clytaemestra became lovers. They shared the same hatred for Agamemnon and began to conspire together. They planned to murder him when he came back to Argos.

The siege of Troy lasted ten years. Finally the city fell and was sacked by the Greek army, its temples were destroyed, and the surviving inhabitants were sold into slavery. *Agamemnon*, the first play of Aeschylus' trilogy *The Oresteia*, takes place in Argos shortly after the fall of Troy.

Agamemnon returns home with only one ship because his fleet was scattered by a storm at sea. He is accompanied by his newest concubine, Cassandra, the daughter of the king of Troy. Aegisthus remains in the background while Clytaemestra gives her husband an affectionate welcome and the people of Argos applaud their victorious king. Later, Clytaemestra traps Agamemnon in his bath and kills him with an axe. Cassandra is murdered also. Clytaemestra and Aegisthus announce the murders to the people, overcome the opposition of the Elders, and set themselves up as the new rulers of Argos.

The action of *The Choephori*, the second play, takes place a few years later. Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, has been living in exile in the nearby kingdom of Phocis. In obedience to a

command given him by the god Apollo, Orestes returns to Argos to avenge his father. He seeks out his sister Electra, then gains admittance to the palace by disguising himself and kills Clytaemestra and Aegisthus. Orestes tries to justify the murder of his mother, but in the final scene of the play he is afflicted with madness and flees in terror from the Furies, hideous spirits who hunt down and punish murderers.

The story of *The Eumenides*, the last play, begins a few days later. Orestes seeks refuge in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi. He is forced to wander as an outcast for the next few years, with the Furies constantly tormenting him. Finally he arrives at Athens and throws himself on the mercy of the goddess Athene. The Furies follow him there and insist that Orestes must be punished for matricide. He claims that he acted according to Apollo's dictate and is not responsible for the crime. Athene convenes a special court to hear the case, but the jurors are unable to reach a verdict. Athene casts the deciding vote and Orestes is acquitted. The Furies angrily threaten vengeance on Athens, but Athene propitiates them by the offer of a position of honor in the cult of her city. They accept. The ancient Furies are transformed into benevolent spirits. Their name is changed to the Eumenides, or "kindly ones," to symbolize their new character.

The legends about the family of Atreus were among the most popular in the Greek mythological heritage and many versions of them were known in the ancient world. Some elements of the story are recounted in the *Odyssey* of Homer. Pindar and other poets made use of the legend also, and it provided the plots for many tragedies in addition to the trilogy of Aeschylus, including *Electra* by Sophocles, and *Electra*, *Orestes*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and *Iphigenia in Tauris* by Euripides. A complete account of the legend, with reference to all its sources and variant versions, will be found in Volume II of *The Greek Myths* by Robert Graves, available in paperback edition, or in any other good handbook of classical mythology.

## O'Neill's Use of the Greek Myth

The preceding story comes from the many legends of the Greeks which were used by ancient Greek playwrights to form the basic plot of their dramas. One dramatist, Aeschylus, wrote a trilogy about the entire myth. Other dramatists, wrote about portions of the myth. O'Neill's version is based most specifically on the original trilogy by Aeschylus but is modified by the utilization of certain aspects of Sigmund Freud's psychological theories in order to give the trilogy an entirely modern interpretation.

Ezra Mannon is Agamemnon, the general returning from the war to his temple (mansion) and to his beautiful wife Christine, who is the counterpart to Clytaemestra. As in the Greek myth, Christine has taken a lover in her husband's absence who is actually a distant relative of the family bearing a strong grudge against the family. Thus Adam Brant functions as does Aegisthus in the original play. But whereas in the original, Aegisthus actually assisted Clytaemestra in killing Agamemnon, in O'Neill's play, Adam merely buys the poison which Christine administers.

Lavinia and Orin Mannon are the counterparts to Electra and Orestes. In the original, Electra is also very attached to her father and determines to revenge his death because of her love for him. Freud took the name of his concept, "the Electra complex," from this play. But in Aeschylus, Orestes had grown up in another country and was not so attached to his own mother. However, to round out his study, O'Neill makes Orin become the typical Freudian figure with a severe Oedipus complex, that is, an unnaturally strong attraction to his mother.

In the Greek trilogy, Orestes was the main character throughout the last two plays. In fact, Electra fades from the picture as Aeschylus shows the effect of murder on the character of Orestes. In this respect, O'Neill varies most from his source, since he retains Lavinia as the main character all the way through the trilogy. In the Greek myth, Orestes is haunted by abstract furies for the murder of his mother, whereas O'Neill has Orin persecuted by his haunting conscience.

In addition to the main plot and the main character, O'Neill also borrows the device of the Greek chorus. In the ancient plays, the

dramatist always had a chorus which announced the intent of the play and provided a certain amount of background information. O'Neill uses the chorus of townspeople to fulfill this purpose. He also tries to confine his time to a short period, to conform with the classical unities of time, place, and action.

Essentially, O'Neill has followed the framework of the ancient trilogy very closely, but changed the purpose in order to comment upon the driving sexual forces found in modern man. Aeschylus

wanted to make a comment about community justice as opposed to personal revenge, but O'Neill uses the same story to illustrate the sexual motivations of various members of the family and to show man as the victim of urges beyond his control.

## Questions for Review

1. How did Christine's love turn to hate? What forces caused this reversal?

2. How are the circumstances surrounding Lavinia's and Orin's births used to suggest later characteristics?

3. How convincing was Adam Brant's desire for revenge? What are the exact motivations?

4. Why does O'Neill have Adam resemble both Ezra and Orin? How does this account for Christine's attraction toward Adam Brant?

5. What proof is there that Lavinia also loved Adam Brant and wanted him dead because she was jealous of Christine?

6. Why are all the characters referred to as having mask-like faces? What are the circumstances when each removes his or her mask?

7. Why does O'Neill attempt to make Ezra Mannon into a somewhat sympathetic character just before his murder?

8. How do Seth and the other townspeople function in the play? Explain each of their functions.

9. How central is the setting of the play to the theme? Explain.

10. What are the similarities between this play and the ancient Greek myth?