

EXPRESSIONISTIC TECHNIQUE IN EUGENE O'NEILL'S THE HAIRY APE

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Abstract :

This paper seeks to explore the expressionistic technique in Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape. Eugene O'Neill (1888 – 1953) is one of the most distinguished playwrights in the spheres of twentieth century American literature. He focuses on the psychological trauma of individuals in the materialistic society of America. As an existentialist, he considers life is essentially tragic and he managed to portray it in a very realistic manner. However, he is not a pessimist and considers life to be accepted as it comes. The hopes and promises make it meaningful and worth-living. As a dramatist, he skillfully woven the realistic dramatization of human condition through his tragedies. O'Neill has remarked : "The playwright must dig at the roots of the sickness today as he feels it." The feeling of isolation, which has become the hallmark of the modern age, springs from the tragic sense of life. It is variously described as loss of identity, loneliness, alienation, meaninglessness, loss of faith or values, rootlessness, anomie or anxiety-state, etc. It is recognized as a symptom of man's contemporary crisis, a human problem, a condition of having the experience but missing the meaning. Through the effective use of expressionistic symbolism, O'Neill distinguishes the misfortune of men's isolation, loneliness and their quest for identity at various levels. Through this technique, Eugene O'Neill portrays the inner psyche of the characters. He is able to depict the unconscious rather than the conscious mind of characters.

Keywords – expressionistic, racked, ape, juxtaposed, radical, X-ray, photographs, etc.

Introduction :

Julian Auguste Harve was a painter. He wanted to differentiate his paintings from impressionism and employed the term Expressionism in 1901. Beneath the influence of Swedish writer Strindberg, expressionistic movement in art was initiated in Germany in early twentieth century. It was at its height between 1901 to 1925 just before, during and after World War I. Expressionists endeavored to express as intensely as possible the authors usually bitter reaction to the world around him. Expressionistic art often depersonalize and dehumanize its subject to convey the shock of unfortunately being alive in the cruel modern world. Expressionist is trying to depicts the world as it seems to his mind or to his literary character instead of presenting the world as it is.

Importance of the Study :

Expressionism, actually, is a radical revolt against the artistic and literary tradition of 'realism'. The expressionistic playwright undertakes to express a personal vision of human life and human society. Expressionism is a literature of the extreme, a literature of rebellion. In the theatre, tradition was represented by naturalism, the movement that originated from Emile Zola, and became popular in the works of Henrik Ibsen and Bernard Shaw. Naturalism developed into the modern problem play. It became a comedy of manners of the social drop-outs. Expressionist wanted to create a fresh air in the theatre by refusing the ossified mold of naturalism. Expressionism, the name itself suggests that the writer does not use the more action on the stage but uses minimum dialogues and minimum characters to express his inner bent of mind. The action is less important but the playwright believes in the expression of the characters. Basically it is a very difficult to depict the inner mind of the characters but through the proper use of a technique it is very easy to portray the 'inner psyche' or 'inner reality' meticulously. It was an attempt to explore and present the unconscious more than the conscious mind of the characters. In this discourse R. S. Furness observes the spirit of expressionism

"The soul under stress, racked and burning in fearful-this preoccupation may be called expressionist".

The literary elements like plot, characters, and dialogues undergo a change in the expressionistic play. Regarding characters, the technique is extremely subjective. The language of expressionistic play is highly personal, lyrical and condensed. Another aspect of the expressionistic play is the use of non-literary devices like sound, lighting, and setting, while in the naturalistic play these elements tend to be mimetic or life-like, in the expressionistic theatre they are distorted in order to communicate the new vision of life.

Research Methodology :

Research Methodology is more important to analyse the research problems. It is a systematic way to solve the problem in a systematic way. For gaining the objectives of literary research and for genuine and original contribution of the knowledge, I thoroughly studied the original novels of Eugene O'Neill. I also applied the new concepts and ideas to the selected works and try to my level best to achieve the success in the spheres of literature. By applying the descriptive and analytical methods of research, I am able to understand the situation in American people's mind. They were physically strong but psychologically they were loose. By applying the expressionistic technique Eugene O'Neill depicted the human predicament in *The Hairy Ape*.

Main Text of the Paper :

In the best period of German Expressionism, 1917 to 1923 the plays of George Kaiser and Ernst Toller express the agony of life through characters. Outside Germany, it was in America that Expressionism made a strong impact, specially in the plays of Eugene O'Neill such as *The Emperor Jones* (1921), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), *The Great God Brown* (1926). Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923) was influenced by Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*. O'Neill's attitude to the expressionist theatre was ambiguous. In the interview published in the

New York Herald Tribune, March 16, 1924, O'Neill observed:.

"..... expressionism denies the value of characterization..... I personally do not believe that an idea can be readily put over to an audience except through characters.... The real contribution of the expressionist has been in the dynamic qualities of his plays. They express something in modern life better than did the old plays. I have something of this method in *The Hairy Ape*. But the character Yank remains a man and everyone recognizes him as such."

While writing the play named *The Hairy Ape*, he was deeply influenced by George Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*. Kaiser is interested in depicting the situation of Individual.

The Hairy Ape (1922) is an influential expressionistic play of O'Neill. We can observe almost all the characteristics of expressionism in this play. Drama is the best medium to represent the writer himself before the world through the expressionistic technique like the *Cashier* in Kaiser's play, Yank is the central consciousness in O'Neill's play, and the other stokers and prisoners seem to be mere productions of Yank. The energy and vitalism of Yank in his identification with the power of the ship remind one of the dithyrambic ecstasy of Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, and the universal declamatory power of Whitman.

In expressionistic play, the much emphasis has been given the central figure and minor character seemed to be the subordinate to him. Before Yank who is protagonist. Before him Paddy, Long and the secretary of I.W. W. are nothing but the nameless entity. Yank visited the workplace of the secretary of I.W. W. The other people in its office are also equal lacking in individuality. The situation compels the dramatist to throw light on the suffering of Yank and what goes on within his soul. This is nothing but an autobiographical element of dramatist. As Clifford Leech points out,

" the dramatic personages in an expressionistic play may be juxtaposed, but there is no elaborate development of their relationship".

Yank and Mildred met only for a moment but it is enough to play havoc with the soul of Yank. The smallest characters are present in moments but they stamp their impression on the mind of the audience or reader.

The expressionist used exaggerated gesture, hampering color sound and movement for more effect on the mind of the audience. The dialogues are frequently repeated not only to emphasize the lack of sophistication but also to drive home to the audience the obsession of the characters. Such expressions as "I belong", "I'll fix her", "I am the end", "That's me", etc., work like motifs to establish the fact that basically Yank's unsophisticated mind is guided by only a few ideas.

The expressionistic play is shorter than the realistic plays because the action is rapidly

going on the stage. This also accounts for The Hairy Ape as of other expressionistic plays. The short scenes give more effect than the traditional long scenes. These short scenes are deeply connected with the protagonist's consciousness. These change are not logically related nor sketched with the completeness of a realistic play. Much is left to the imagination of the audience, and the connections between the scenes are emotional and not logical. The only living personage in the play is the central figure, Yank. The action is focused on the consciousness of Yank. For portraying the tortured soul of Yank, the playwright has employed the technique of "interior monologue". The monologue of Yank is very important after he has been thrown over piece of psycho- analysis. The dramatist has skillfully woven the disillusionment of Yank by using the technique. He had come to the I.W.W. office with the conviction that he belonged to it, but in vain.

Mildred's word 'a filthy beast' threw on the ear of Yank like a pots and pan. These words were always humming around his ear throughout the play. It also creates the distinction of classes and masses. It is a sign of psycho analysis running in the mind of Yank throughout the play. The dramatist not only wanted to portray the inner reality of the Yank but the disintegration of all modern human beings. By applying these technique, O'Neill wanted to reform the modern society. There is a strong condemnation of the capitalism in expressionistic plays. Yank, the representative of the masses where as Mildred Douglas is the representative of the classes. Here, we can find now, masses were exploited by the classes. The eighth scene is very important because it is the study of Yank's thinking processes. It reaches the height of Yank's severance personality. For the condemnation of the capitalism, Yank takes revenge on that rejected world. His thought are not connected with rationally or logically. As J.W. Marriott rightly observes : a realistic play is based on superficial observation of detail- a mere photography; but an expressionism has been likened to an X-ray photograph.

Expressionistic method is used when the dramatist aims at a probe into the unconscious. In order to help the audience to understand the inner psyche of the character, the expressionist uses symbols, metaphors, fables and allegories. He provides smear figures on the darkened stage to personalize good or bad motives.

After disappointing from the whole materialistic world Yank was passing from a Zoo, where he finds gorilla and thought that even animal can realize his grudge about the society. On the contrary, gorilla crushed him to death and monkeys in the other cages applauded for the victory of animal being over human beings. It is one of the significant suggestive reference of expressionistic technique. He utilized the expeditious technique of the German dramatist. The action follows a continuous forward movement. Each scene is well defined on the stage in psychological retracing in Yank's consciousness of the various stages in human evolution.

Conclusion :

O'Neill is considered as the perennial experimenter of new methods and techniques. He has the capacity to blend realism and expressionism in his plays. The purpose of both the 'isms' are same, to portray effectively the tragedy of modern life. Indeed, the greatness of O'Neill as a dramatist lies in this combination of realism and expressionism. Few men have achieved this type of success, a balanced combination of the two as O'Neill has done. The Hairy Ape ends with a note of affirmation and perhaps, Yank - The Hairy Ape - at last belong to

death.

Thus the expressionist did not want to present mankind's grappling with outside forces rather they sought to dramatize his struggle with himself. In this connection Edward Albert remarks, "expressionistic drama was not concerned with society but with a man".

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