



Marxist Reading of The Hairy Ape.

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Abstract:

Marxism as a movement founded by Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels is one of the most powerful movements in the human history. It was responsible for many revolutions throughout the world and it still continues to be a dominant political force all over the world in different forms. According to Marx, **human** history is the history of class struggles and materialism is the ultimate driving force for all the relationships in the society. For him, human society has evolved through different stages. The apparently natural political evolution involved feudalism leading to bourgeois capitalism leading to socialism and eventually to utopian communism. According to Marxist, literature reflects those social institutions out of which it emerges; it reflects class struggle and materialism. So Marxist generally view literature not as works created with accordance with time less artistic criteria, but as the products of the economic and ideological factors specific to that era. Therefore, writer's position in society has an important bearing on what is written by him/her (Barry 152).

KEY WORDS: Social, Economic, Communism, Ideological.

INTRODUCTION: The play Hairy Ape is about a laborer known as Yank and his companions whose shovel coal into of a transatlantic ocean liner. The name "Yank" given to protagonist makes him representative of masses as "Yank" is short form of "Yankee" which is the term used to refer to an American (Wikipedia Contributors). Yank and his co-workers are wage earners who have been showing as dirty; Sometimes they even forget to wash their faces (O'Neil, 18). In the opening scene of the play, we see these characters in firemen's fore-castle. There are steel bunks, rooms crowded with men, all in dungaree pants and heavy ugly shoes (6). They can't stand upright and resemble Neanderthal man. They are shown less human and more beastly. The setting shows the condition of proletariat class. The setting of first scene have been set in contrast with the setting of second scene. Second scene is set in a section of the promenade deck and the characters – Mildred and her aunt are resting in deck chairs. They are very well dressed and wearing jewelry. Eugene says impression to be conveyed by this scene is one of the "... beautiful, vivid life of the sea all about – sunshine on the deck in great flood" (12).

It reflects the life of upper class people whom have all the luxuries of life while having to do nothing. Mildred becomes representative of capitalist class which is enforced by the fact that her grandfather, we are told, owns largest steel company in the world. When she wants access to Stock hole by saying that she is a student of sociology, she is denied access but as soon as she says that she is a granddaughter of a capitalist, her wish is immediately granted. She tries to defy her class and wants to make contact with the workers but refuses to change her dress, which becomes symbolic of the stubbornness of her class and her failure to transcend her class. Similarly, workers after finishing their shifts wash their faces but they are unable to remove the soot from their faces (18). This shows no matter how hard they try, they won't be able to free themselves under these circumstances. The encounter between Mildred and workers becomes an encounter between two classes and the result is catastrophic as famously said by Karl Marx:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of all class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and Journey man, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large in the common ruin of the contending class (The Communist Manifesto 55).

Paddy in his speech gives contrast between pre-capitalist days and the contemporary times, he says, 'For day was, enough when we was free man' (O'Neill 11). The imagery used by Paddy like "blazing sky" or "Winking stars" shows that before capitalism, workers were not alienated in any form. But now, according to him, workers are exploited and treated as subhuman, imagery used by him is profound. He says "Black smoke from funnels smudging the sea, smudging the decoking our lungs with coal dust breaking our backs and heart in stokehole" (11).

In this speech, Paddy criticizes Yank for saying that they belong, according to him; there is no such thing as belonging in the industrial world. This according to Marx is lineation of labor from his produce (Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 31).

In scene V, class distinction becomes more prominent. This scene is set in Fifth Avenue (New York). Eugene writes "A general atmosphere of clean, well-tidied, wide streets" (O'Neill 22). The road is so clean that Yank says an egg can be fried on it. There is a jewelry shop and a furrier next to it. Items in each shop have enormous price tag. In this setting, Yank and his co-worker Long is totally misfit. They are dressed in dirty clothes and are unshaven. The black smudge of coal dust is still on their bodies. They see rich people leaving from church and Long remarks they are asking God for more money (22).

The women leaving from church are rouged and over dressed and the men are also wearing branded and costly clothes. They don't even feel the presence of Yank and Long. This shows how upper class is oblivious of the condition of working class even though it is at their cost that upper class is able to live in luxury. When Long see the price tags of jewelry, he says that price tag of every single item in these shops is enough to feed an family for a year but rich people buy these items as toys for fun (23).

Eugene being a socialist expresses his disliking for the capitalist system which dehumanizes People. The play depicts the condition of industrial workers of the time. While capitalists were perusing American Dream, workers were being exploited. Nothing makes oppression clearer than the contrasts shown by Eugene in the play.

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