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## Making Victim: Establishing A Framework For Analyzing Victimization In 20th Century American Theatre

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MAKING VICTIM:  
ESTABLISHING A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING  
VICTIMIZATION IN 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN THEATRE

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida, 2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Theatre  
in the Department of Theatre  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## ABSTRACT

It is my belief that theatre is the telling of stories, and that playwrighting is the creation of those stories. Regardless of the underlying motives (to make the audience think, to make them feel, to offend them or to draw them in,) the core of the theatre world is the storyline. Some critics write of the importance of audience effect and audience reception; after all, a performance can only be so named if at least one person is there to witness it. So much of audience effect is based the storyline itself - that structure of which is created by the power characters have over others. Theatre generalists learn of Aristotle's well-made play structure. Playwrights quickly learn to distinguish between protagonists and antagonists. Actors are routinely taught physicalizations of creating "status" onstage. A plotline is driven by the power that people, circumstances, and even fate exercise over protagonists. Most audience members naturally sympathize with the underdog or victim in a given storyline, and so the submissive or oppressed character becomes (largely) the most integral.

By what process, then, is this sense of oppression created in a play? How can oppression/victimization be analyzed with regard to character development? With emerging criticism suggesting that the concept of character is dying, what portrayals of victim have we seen in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century? What framework can we use to fully understand this complex concept? What are we to see in the future, and how will the concept evolve?

In my attempt to answer these questions, I first analyze the definition of "victim" and what categories of victimization exist – the victim of a crime, for example, or the victim of psychological oppression. "Victim" is a word with an extraordinarily complex

definition, and so for the purposes of this study, I focus entirely on social victimization - that is, oppression or harm inflicted on a character by their peers or society. I focus on three major elements of this sort of victimization: harm inflicted on a character by another (not by their own actions), harm inflicted despite struggle or protest, and a power or authority endowed on the victimizer by the victim. After defining these elements, I analyze the literary methods by which playwrights can represent or create victimization – blurred lines of authority, expressive text, and the creation of emotion through visual and auditory means.

Once the concept of victim is defined and a framework established for viewing it in the theatre, I analyze the victimization of one of American theatre’s most famous sufferers – Eugene O’Neill’s Yank in The Hairy Ape. To best contextualize this character, I explore the theories of theatre in this time period – reflections of social struggles, the concept of hierarchy, and clearly drawn class lines. I also position The Hairy Ape in its immediate historical and theoretical time period, to understand if O’Neill created a reflection on or of his contemporaries. Finally, I look at the concept of victim through the nonrealistic and nonlinear plays of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – how it has changed, evolved, or even (as Eleanor Fuchs may suggest) died. I found that my previously established framework for “making victim” has change dramatically to apply to contemporary nonlinear theatre pieces.

Through this study, I have found that the lines of victimization and authority are as blurred today in nonrealistic and nonlinear theatre as they were in the seemingly “black and white” dramas of the 1920s and 30s. In my research, I have found the very beginnings of an extraordinarily complex definition of “victim”.

For my father.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I began this thesis project captivated by American theatre of the 1920s and 30s. During this time, so many European artists were coming to America fleeing World War I and innumerable influences of theatrical styles blended together all at once. I had previously written on Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape, and Langston Hughes's Mulatto, and found both to be interesting and well-crafted pieces touching on important social issues. American laborers during this time period also faced a good deal of strife, and I began to explore how struggles in the labor industry might be reflected in plays from the time period – The Hairy Ape, specifically. I was convinced that Yank represented the average American laborer.

My thesis chair brought up a startling question: Why is Yank a victim? Is he really a victim? What constitutes “victim,” anyway? And the wheels in my head began to spin. I had always taken Yank as a victim of many things: his sociocultural status, his work environment, and his intellectual capability. In every theatre course I can remember, my fellow students and I blindly accepted Yank's victimization without much thought. The very idea that Yank could be anything but a victim challenged and inspired me. I wanted to explore why my classmates and I had always assumed that Yank is a victim in The Hairy Ape - this became my guiding research question.

Furthermore, I wanted to explore why some victims can be accepted/assumed by the reader, and others might have to be actively crafted by the playwright. Do cultural circumstances come into play? If Yank is taken out of context in American history and loses his label of a laborer, does he still remain a victim? There are sociocultural issues to consider: how much of Yank's victimization is due to social class? Does he have the



power to change any of it? His manner of speech, his attitude, and his inability to deal with the upper classes were characteristics I had previously viewed as products of his victimization. I needed to explore whether or not these characteristics actually were the *producers* of his victimization. I had to first establish a framework with which to view and explore “victim” in a theatrical sense, and then apply it to The Hairy Ape. My hopes were that, by creating this framework, I could create a rubric by which authority status may be defined and classified in future criticism.

These questions led me to the attempted definition of the word “victim.” What are the different kinds of victimization? Today, the word is used almost too frequently, with people claiming to be victims of their upbringing, victims of the “system”, and victims of their lives. Criminal and physical victimization also exist. Which of these categories is determined solely by culture? I needed to compare the obvious victim of a violent crime with the slightly-more-difficult-to-analyze victim of an overly-doting mother. What about battered wives that refuse to leave their husbands? Sufferers of Stockholm Syndrome? Are they victims?

In Chapter Two, I explore the different definitions of “victim,” and the different associations each have in society. While a good portion of this section is based on my own experiences and plays I have read in the past, I also employ information on victimization from criminology and psychology studies – specifically, Albert Reiss Jr.’s writings in The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology with regard to American crime statistics. I even consulted the Psychology Bible – the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV – to read about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. What I found was that “victim” was simply too complex of a term to be defined in the context of one

study. For the purposes of this paper, I had to limit my research to sociocultural victimization.

After I touched on many forms of victimization and settled my focus on sociocultural victimization, my next question was “How does this idea of “victim” transfer to the stage?” How can a playwright infer or connote “victim”? Do costumes play a role? Is victim made in storyline alone? Or characterization? And so I discuss the different methods by which a playwright or director can create victim – in setting, dialogue, sounds/noises, visual imagery, and relationships to other characters.

The category of sociocultural victimization is an incredibly complex concept in itself, and for the purposes of this study I settled on three main elements of this kind of victimization to look for as I researched: harm or oppression inflicted by an outside source and not the character’s actions, harm or oppression inflicted despite the character’s struggle against it, and a power or authority endowed by the victim on the victimizer. I read about victimization and the American theatre of the 1920s and 30s, and during this research a common thread arose: a defined polarity of good-versus-evil. In most plays of this time period, I found a concept of hierarchy determining authority levels. How does this hierarchy affect our notions of victimization?

To address this issue, I moved away from broad, philosophical analysis and toward a specific dramaturgical look at theatrical pieces from the time period. I decided on a sample of canonical pieces: Langston Hughes’s Mulatto, Sophie Treadwell’s Machinal, Lillian Hellman’s The Little Foxes, and Clifford Odets’s Waiting for Lefty. In them, I found the victim-creating devices of race and class hierarchy, gender roles and the oppression of women, wealth and socioeconomic authority, and working-class/laborer

strife, respectively. As I analyzed these pieces, I found that each typically focused on one main device for creating victim. However, O'Neill's The Hairy Ape utilized them all.

David Krasner's A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama helped me immensely during this portion of my research. The numerous chapters in the companion devoted a considerably amount of space to the 1920s and 30s, and with several authors often discussing the same pieces or trends, I found a variety of different opinions from which to springboard my thesis. Anne Fletcher's chapter "Reading Across the 1930s" provided a detailed overview of theatre from the time period, drawing in historical and cultural context as well as specific dramaturgical focus on many theatre pieces. Felicia Hardison Londré's chapter "Many-Faceted Mirror: Drama as Reflection of Uneasy Modernity in the 1920s" provided a clear breakdown of theatre of the 1920s in America: focusing on themes and subjects, genres, dramaturgy, dialogue, and theatricality in theatre of this time period. While none of the authors in the companion spoke specifically about victimization (despite an entire chapter on Eugene O'Neill,) I did find the publication useful as a contextual resource for the 1920s and 30s in American Theatre.

This research led me to spending Chapter Four on The Hairy Ape's context – both theoretically and historically. In order to argue that sociocultural positioning can aid in creating victim, I wanted to understand the circumstances under which The Hairy Ape was written. I had seen the same polarity in O'Neill's piece as I had in my overview of the 1920s and 30s – rich vs. poor, educated vs. uneducated, a fragile woman in a white dress vs. the "ape" in the soot-covered stokehole. However, I also found several blurred lines and debatable points with regard to the innocence or victimization of other characters. In Chapter Four I "set the stage" for my full analysis of Yank as victim by

discussing the historical and theoretical climate of the 1920s and 30s as well as the social statement made by the abandonment of humanity for animalistic qualities in The Hairy Ape.

At this point, I thought I had reached what was my concluding portion – the analysis of O’Neill’s masterpiece and Yank’s victimization. My previously established framework of sociocultural victimization elements from Chapter Two applied fairly well, and I was quite happy with the results. Of course, “victim” is very complex and debatable; I felt I had reached the best possible framework for discussing this topic.

But then my thesis chair brought up another question. Why does this matter? Why is it even important to prove that Yank is characterized as a victim? I began to think about possible relevance, and that led me to another question which became the basis for Chapter Six – does this framework apply to victimization today? Where has victimization gone? Has the concept changed or evolved?

I immediately went to Elinor Fuchs’s The Death of Character, a 1996 publication that discusses the decline or loss of the fully formed character in contemporary theatre, and explains the different stylistic or artistic methods used in place of this fully formed character. Her book served as a useful resource – a cursory look at countless theatrical trends, companies, and productions in contemporary times. Fuchs traces the origin of character in theatre and the increase in focus on pattern and imagery, referencing realism, modernism, and postmodernism. Her focus is both dramaturgical and performance-focused, and provides me with many possible views of contemporary theatre. The Death of Character aided me greatly in answering my constantly developing questions: What techniques exist now, and how have they changed? If character is dying and clear linear

plotlines are being abandoned for representation and imagery, what does this do to the concept of victim?

I began to find less of the black-and-white polarity and clear-cut authority lines that O’Neill’s work displays. Arguably, all of the pieces I had referenced thus far had some blurred lines and ambiguity, however; the plays Fuchs explored surpassed all I had seen. I discovered blurred lines of gender, character, role, and intention – as well as a good helping of moral ambiguity. My entire framework for studying The Hairy Ape focused on the use of “good vs. evil” – without that polarity, how can victim be truly created, inferred, or analyzed? Chapter Six seeks to answer that question by looking at several contemporary performances, their literary devices, and the effects those devices might have on a reader.

This entire project has been driven by the question “Why?” O’Neill’s Yank continually attempts to intellectualize his situation (in an ultimate attempt to transcend it.) I attempt to question, explore, and understand how the notion of victimization plays out in both contemporary drama and drama of the 1920s and 30s – with the hope of establishing a common vocabulary and philosophy for its analysis from this point forward.

## **CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORING “VICTIM”**

Before I can begin a discussion on how victims are created in theatre, or even what victims are, I first attempt to define “victimization”. Today, the word is used to mean a multitude of different forms of harm or oppression. By systematically discussing different categories of victimization (and methods by which a playwright can suggest them), I can begin to establish a framework for further analysis of plays. The first category I discuss is physical victimization, seen criminally in sufferers of rape, brutality, theft, and murder; and seen medically in those suffering from disease. The second category included is emotional victimization, seen in those who have been inflicted with psychological pain or oppression. Lastly, sociocultural victimization is identified through socioeconomic and cultural means.

Physical victimization is not difficult to decipher in a medical sense. A person experiencing suffering from a disease becomes the victim of the ailment. This suffering spans a full spectrum of severity: cancer patients are victims of a ravenous cell mutation wreaking havoc on their bodies just as sufferers of the common cold are victims of a rhinovirus. Any unpleasant or unfortunate symptoms are signs of medical victimization. It is important for me to note that the words “unpleasant” or “unfortunate” are extraordinarily subjective. It is, perhaps, this subjectivity that allows for a medical sense of victimization to be malleable depending on the victim. One patient may woefully suffer a congested nose, while another faces AIDS with few reservations. The key point in this analysis is that even medical victimization – seemingly so clear-cut – can be subjective when we consider the specific meaning of the word “victim.” We see

examples of such victimization in the world of theatre: in the many “AIDS plays,” as well as those dealing with terminal disease; such as Margaret Edson’s Wit.

Another subcategory of physical victimization is the criminal: suffering inflicted on others by those committing illegal acts. This is not as simplistic of a concept as medical victimization. If burglary were not illegal, could a person who has had their home ransacked still be considered a victim? How much sociocultural emphasis is placed when defining “victim”? Would the famous 1980 case in Maharashtra, India (where two policemen were acquitted of rape against a 16-year old girl on the basis she was overly sexual and she could not possibly have resisted their advances) have constituted victim in any other country?

Albert Reiss, Jr., writes in his forward to the 1973 issue of The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology that (American) crime researchers have a number of shortcomings with their data analysis: “For much of their history, statistics on crime events have lumped person and organizational victims together in the calculation of crime rates” (706). Reiss mentions that the policies of both Uniform Crime Reporting and the National Crime Survey have consistently neglected to specify between criminal attacks on businesses and those on individuals. While this means little to the world of theatre, it only reinforces the historiographic view that facts and statistics are still subjective. For the purposes of this thesis, I will not debate statistic accuracy; rather, I will consider criminally physical victimization to represent the infliction of harm on another person through illegal means – considering, of course, the legal context of a play’s setting and storyline. Examples of this form of victimization are also present in the theatrical world – such as in the sexual abuse of Paula Vogel’s How I Learned to Drive. This piece also has

a number of blurred lines (of fault, blame, and manipulation) and fits well with an extraordinarily subjective and debatable category of victimization.

Emotional or psychological victimization can be closely connected with physical victimization: seen, for example, in Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder, defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV

as the development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate.

(American Psychiatric Association 463)

PTSD is seen most often in the theatrical world in war plays – for example, Emily Mann's Still Life. However, psychological victimization is a much broader topic than formal disorders spawned in wartime – spanning abuse, fear, and even poor self-esteem. All of these conditions negatively alter the psychological welfare of a human being against their will, yet not all are inflicted criminally. Take for example an overly doting mother who, by her oppressive manner of child-rearing, develops a psychologically victimized child who is co-dependent and unable to function independently to the best of their ability. Can I not declare this child a victim? Yet the mother is no criminal – legally speaking.



Fear of losing basic necessities and the means required to obtain them (food, water, shelter, employment) leads not only to simply psychological victimization, but sociocultural victimization, as well. In this situation, a citizen experiencing social strife (such as an American during the Great Depression) may feel helpless to provide security for himself or his family and lead to psychological upset. It is impossible to overlook Arthur Miller's 1949 Death of a Salesman as a prime example. Willy Loman is fired from his job as a traveling salesman and ultimately realizes he cannot provide for his family. After struggling with his sense of self-worth and ability, Loman decides the only way out is to commit suicide – both for the insurance payoff, and his ability to escape shame. It is fair to say here that Willy Loman is a victim of his social pressures and responsibilities: he feels that without an ability to provide for his family, he is worthless. However, it is arguable that Willy Loman chose this fate: by failing to actively pursue other solutions to the problem. True, Loman suffers, but he ultimately succumbs to his victimization and commits suicide, rather than searching for a way out. Victimization's subjectivity and complexity is well represented in this category of emotional/psychological victimization.

I cannot possibly analyze the entire theatrical environment of the 1920s and 30s with respect to all possible kinds of victimization: it is simply too complex for one research effort. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus specifically on sociocultural victimization: harm or oppression inflicted on a character by their peers or society in a legal and nonviolent way.

One example of sociocultural victimization is an oppressive or uncertain working environment. These conditions can leave an employee emotionally unstable and fearful for their employment, and thus their well-being. A single mother on welfare may not

have sufficient wealth to provide adequate medical care for herself or her child, leading to disease. A member of the lower-class may not have adequate access to education, and thus be a victim of “the system,” stuck in their social class interminably. Racial minorities, when discriminated against, are said to be victims of racism.

Of the many forms of victimization, sociocultural victimization may be the most difficult to portray in the theatre. Medical victimization is simply a sense of setting and circumstance. Criminal victimization requires action that is written directly into the plotline. Emotional victimization requires more craftsmanship, and can be represented in emotional back-story or character development. Sociocultural victimization, however, must delicately balance the actions of other characters and their reception by the intended victim to create a clear picture of oppression - no matter how subtle.

Sociocultural victimization is also arguably the most complex and subjective of all forms of victimization. It can encompass harm or oppression inflicted on a character by any number of the people in their life as well as oppression or harm inflicted by an employer, government, social class system, or economy. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on what I feel are the three most important elements of sociocultural victimization for portrayal in the theatre: harm inflicted by an outside source (not of the character’s own making), harm experienced despite a struggle or fight against it (the character acknowledges or fights the oppression), and a power or authority endowed on the victimizer by the victim.

While attempting to explore these (by no means exhaustive) categories of victimization gives me a useful terminology with which to discuss victimization in theatre, it does not explore the many ways a playwright may begin crafting victim in their

work. The above-mentioned circumstances may affect characters in plays, and provide plot-driving events or character background – but they do not alone make a victim. Playwrights may craft both the character of victim and the sense of victimization through many methods: setting, dialogue, sounds/noises, visual imagery, and the definition of relationships to other characters. In each of these methods, a clear sense of power/authority must be established – either over a specific character, or over the audience as a whole.

The establishment of a particular setting may help a playwright craft victimization. The choice to set a play in a specific environment can infer oppression or victimization. For example, the use of an oppressive or negative environment can quickly and effectively give the reader a sense of character and victimization.

For example, in Margaret Edson's Wit, most of the play's action takes place in a room of a hospital's cancer center. From the very beginning of the action, readers may associate the symbol of "hospital" and associate it with an event or emotion. It is a generalized but fair statement to say that most would think of one of two things: tragedy (disease/injury) or the birth of a new child. As soon as Edson's main character, Vivian Bearing, enters the stage "tall and very thin, barefoot, and completely bald" (Edson 7) spectators are well aware that the setting is due to a tragedy. From this point forward in the play, a clinically impersonal, cold, and prison-like tone is set. Regardless of any action we might see Vivian Bearing perform, or any bitter comment she may make, the spectator can recognize her struggle and oppression through setting alone – and she becomes a victim.

Setting need not tap into spectators' emotions to connote "victim," however. Historical context is also effective. Clifford Odets's Waiting for Lefty takes place during America's Great Depression and explores the struggles of laborers, union men, and families. Through the historical facts from this time period and what is considered common knowledge about American life during the Great Depression (strife, struggle, poverty), a playwright can craft a sense of victimization. As long as our main character does not enter the stage dripping in wealth, the assumption is that the character is a victim of their Depression-era social circumstances. However, when looking at a historical means of creating victim by setting, the subjectivity of history comes into play.

As scholars, we can understand and analyze history's subjectivity and discuss how that might impact potential victimization in a play, but would an average theatergoer make this same observation? It's safe to assume that while most of the population would know the popular phrase "The winners write the history books," most audiences are not hung up on historiography and will accept historical fact for true fact. This assumption will allow me to analyze the popular reaction audiences would have to a historical setting.

When crafting a story, a playwright may also create the sense of victimization in developing the character themselves. It is important to view the creation of character not only from the perspective of how the character speaks/acts/walks/exists, but from the perspective of that character's relationships with other characters.

A speaker in one of my graduate classes once asked us if we knew who the most important character(s) in the book series Harry Potter was. We all assumed it was the title character, Harry himself. The speaker was quick to correct us; the most important

characters in the series are Harry's aunt and uncle, the Dursleys. Because they severely neglect and mistreat Harry in the very opening of the first book, the readers' sympathies are instantly given to Harry. It is because of their neglect that we care about Harry at all – and it is the only reason any of his adventures capture our attention. This philosophy was entirely new to me, and caused me to think of the motivation behind reader/audience sympathy. Having no prior experience with the Harry Potter series, I too felt nothing for the Dursleys but cared intensely about Harry. This illustrated an integral point for me when considering a character's status, authority, and sense of victimization – the relationships and displays of power in the characters play a pivotal role in establishing sympathy.

Another means of developing character to connote victimization is the physical descriptions a playwright might include in the stage directions or the casting/acting choices a director might make. In acting classes nationwide, budding actors are taught how to physically represent a sense of "status." From my own studies, I remember the specific physical characteristics of a character with high status: slower, more deliberate movements, head held high, steady posture. A character with high status speaks more slowly, and takes up a great deal of space with their body (in the way they sit, stand, walk, etc.) A character with low status will have quicker, nervous movements. They will take up as little space as possible: crossing their arms or legs, or sitting on the floor with their knees drawn to their chest. They will look quickly from one place to another, never maintaining a gaze or stare, and their posture is anything but confident. These traits can connote authority (or the lack thereof) to a spectator, but it is what the characters do with

these traits/authority and how they use that authority to treat others that crafts the difference between a simple authoritative relationship and an oppressive one.

Victimization is crafted when characters use their status or authority to inflict harm on each other. Of course, a “villain” in the classic sense of the word plots against a hero and intentionally inflicts harm – while this certainly can apply in analyzing victimization, other methods of hostile authority can be found. For example, in Edward Albee’s Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? George and Martha continuously play psychological games with their guests, as well as each other. The play opens in the middle of George and Martha’s arrival home after a party. They are inebriated and speak in broken sentences. It is clear that neither one of them is completely tuned in to their reality. The audience member struggles to keep up with their commentary, all the while attempting to pinpoint where exactly we have entered the story.

While all of this could be considered a lighthearted sort of comedy of errors, very early on in the scene, George and Martha’s joking turns hostile: “Good grief! Don’t you know *anything?* *Chicago* was a ‘thirties musical, starring little Miss Alice *Faye*. Don’t you know *anything?*” (Albee 6). The seemingly lighthearted relationship of this married couple shows continuous peeks of its dark underside, and audiences begin to experience the awkward discomfort that comes when an argument occurs at any social gathering. The animosity ebbs and flows throughout the first few scenes, quickly jumping from lighthearted banter to hostility. When George and Martha’s guests (Nick and Honey) arrive, the audience (knowing George and Martha’s personalities) already fears for them.

While entertaining, George and Martha make snide comments to each other – referring to shared memories that are soon to be displayed to the audience. Sometimes,

these references go on for several lines before the full story is revealed to the audience. We have already seen the unpredictable changes in mood from both George and Martha, so when small insinuations begin to appear, tension rises even higher. George and Martha use their authority (seen here in their role as hosts, as well as the power/authority that comes from having knowledge – a sort of “blackmail power”) to inflict psychological harm on their guests, as well as each other. By the end of the play, we feel for Nick and Honey, making their characterization of victim successful.

Victimization can also be crafted outside of characterization and plot through the use of sound and noise. This technique can be written directly into the text for readers and audience members to experience, or may be a directorial contribution to the mood of a set/sound design. Suzan-Lori Parks’s Venus depicts the life of the oppressed Saartjie Baartman, a 19<sup>th</sup> century sideshow performer publicized as the “Hottentot Venus.” Baartman was put on display for her unusually large buttocks and genitalia and was treated horribly (partly due to her status – as a tribal, African woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Parks utilizes the literary technique of oppressive, repetitious dialogue to assist in the creation of Baartman as victim. During her inhumane parade as a sideshow attraction, other performers (bonded at times in the script as “The Chorus of 8 Human Wonders”) chant at the Venus, suggesting childhood taunting:

WONDER #7:

Horror! Horror!

Horror! Horror!

THE CHORUS:

Chain! Chain!

WONDER #8:

Black its black!

Myeye sees black!

THE CHORUS OF 8 HUMAN WONDERS:

Howuhbouthat?!

Howuhbouthat?! (44)

This repetition of words and phrases can oppress the audience and make them feel claustrophobic. Tension rises and discomfort occurs as these phrases bellow from the stage. Through the repetition of these words, audience members and readers are left feeling trapped and uncomfortable – aiding in creating the sense of victim.

Directors, designers, and playwrights may also create victimization through the implementation of visual imagery. This is accomplished through the design of the set, costumes, blocking, and even the literal projection or presence of images onstage. In set design, a sense of victim can be most easily created through an oppressive or claustrophobic set. In the University of Central Florida's recent production of Vaclav Havel's Largo Desolato, the set designer intentionally bowed in the tops of walls creating the inside of an apartment. Vertical support beams intentionally extended beyond the tops of the walls and curved in over the action. Gargoyles sat at the tops of the walls, leering down over the characters. This sense of "caving in" added to the feeling of fear and oppression for all characters involved. While the set design itself did not make the main characters victims, per se, a technique such as this certainly adds to a sense of victimization. Set designs may also mimic and suggest imprisonment through the use of bars, locks, gates, or fences, for example. By "trapping" a character behind these set



pieces, audience members can sense the oppressive atmosphere, and their imprisonment by either another character, social circumstance, or fate. We see many of these characteristics in the set design suggested by O'Neill in his stage directions for The Hairy Ape.

Costumes, while varying greatly from production to production, also have the ability to suggest victim by alluding to the same principles of entrapment and confinement. Tight-fitting pieces with many buckles, straps, or laces may suggest imprisonment, where as loose, flowing clothes suggest freedom. Of course, costume design must be analyzed with a consideration of the characters themselves – a poor farmer, for example, may wear loose-fitting clothes – but he is not necessarily freer or more powerful than a man in a well-tailored suit. Due to the large amount of variance and other motivations behind costume design (historical accuracy, displaying of other character traits,) I find it to be a useful tool to assist in creating the complicated characterization of victim, but not a device which by victim can be determined on its own. It is nearly impossible to infer victimization or oppression simply through the costume an actor might wear (although I am not arguing its usefulness in helping to build the final image.)

Lastly, victim can be suggested through the use of physical images. This can be achieved through the choice of props (belongings that looked as though they have been worn or harmed,) blocking (keeping a victim downstage or constantly shorter in sightline than the oppressor), and the literal display of photos/paintings/images.

Despite the popularity of technology today, the blending of film and theatre has been around for some time. In 1966, Michael Kirby published his article “The Uses of

Film in the New Theatre,” which covers performances of that time period which use film. He indicates that “for many years, motion pictures have been used as elements in staged drama – epic and “total” theatre, the “living newspaper,” etc.” (49). The increasing prevalence of this blended technology, argues Kirby, “have shown formal alternatives to both traditional movies and traditional theatre” (49). Many of the works utilizing film participate in a pastiche aesthetic (discussed further in Chapter Five) and use these images to collage an emotion or message. Kirby specifically recounts a performance of the University of Michigan’s theatre group ONCE – “Unmarked Interchange.” This performance utilized actors, pantomime, dance, and musicians performing in front of a “screen resembling that of a drive-in movie...erected on the flat roof of an Ann Arbor parking garage” (Kirby 53). This screen projected the Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers film *Top Hat*, and the many live performances served to support the visual of classic Hollywood imagery.

With modern technology creeping into the theatre, many directors or playwrights can choose to project images onto the stage itself – either on a set piece or on a screen hung somewhere onstage. This can be extraordinarily powerful: the images serve as a subtext for the plot and actors, and directors can use it to intentionally control the reaction of audience members. As an example: if characters onstage are talking about wartime invasions of other countries, a playwright may suggest the display of images of triumph, success, and the salvation of a once oppressed people. An audience member’s immediate thought will be the successes that wartime can bring. However, should the display be of images of strife, innocent casualties, and a ravaged post-war village, the audience’s mind is directed to the suffering of wartime.

To create victim, images that suggest oppression, violence, depression, failure, sadness, and more can be used on the stage. It is my belief that this technique will become more and more common as today's technology finds a more significant place in the world of the stage. Visual imagery is an extraordinarily powerful tool with which directors, designers and playwrights can create "victim" – on both surface and subconscious levels.

It is clear that there are many methods by which a playwright can connote, construct, and create victimization in his or her works, and many types/subtypes of victimization that can be created/inferred. It is my position that the three most important elements of sociocultural victimization for portrayal in the theatre are harm inflicted by an outside source (not of the character's own making), harm experienced despite a struggle or fight against it (the character acknowledges or fights the oppression), and a power or authority endowed on the victimizer by the victim. I apply this framework and analyze it within the context of the 1920s and 30s in order to gain a contextualized understanding of victim in the time period in which The Hairy Ape was written.

### **CHAPTER THREE: THEATRE VICTIMS IN THE TIME OF THE HAIRY APE**

After looking at my various definitions of and methods of creating a sense of sociocultural victimization, I aim to analyze the victimization of one of American theatre's most famous sufferers, Eugene O'Neill's Yank in The Hairy Ape. To contextualize this character, I explore theories of theatre in this time period – reflections of social struggles, the concept of hierarchy, and clearly drawn class lines. I also position The Hairy Ape in its immediate historical and theoretical time period, to understand how this canonical piece sits within the timeframe of the 1920s and 30s.

American Theatre of the 1920s and 1930s was largely focused on social struggles. Theatre often addresses the current events of the present, and events such as the Great Depression, prohibition, and the significance of union laborers provided a great deal of inspiration for many playwrights of the early 20th century. In her chapter "Many-Faceted Mirror: Drama as Reflection of Uneasy Modernity in the 1920s" in A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama, Felicia Hardison Londré discusses the political setting for plays of this time period:

Having sent American troops in 1917 to fight – for the first time in Europe – ‘to make the world safe for democracy,’ the United States found itself regarded as a world power. But the immediate postwar period brought disillusionment; Americans faced inflation, strikes, Bolshevism (‘the Red menace’), anarchist propaganda and unemployment. (70)

These sociopolitical changes for Americans brought strife and upset into nearly every home. The stock market crashed on October 29, 1929 (the beginning of the Great Depression in the United States), and the crash brought with it years of financial struggle and hardship. Socially, major shifts in the structure of class occurred, in both a gender and racial arena. A major women's liberation movement began around this time, and events such as the Harlem Renaissance introduced a minority presence in the arts. From 1935 to 1939, the Works Progress Administration boosted the theatre through the Federal Theatre Project – an organization that provided a source of employment for playwrights, actors, and all other theatrical professionals with its subsidized regional theatres. The theatre of this time period had many events on which to comment, and each of these social changes was reflected in art from this time.

I cannot possibly provide a detailed theoretical history of the theatre in this time period – simply, too much was occurring. For the purposes of this study, I have selected four iconic plays from this time period's canon that reflect on the major sociopolitical issues occurring at that time. First, I explore gender roles and the oppression of women in Sophie Treadwell's Machinal (1928); second, race and class issues in Langston Hughes's Mulatto (1935); thirdly, working-class and union strife in Clifford Odet's Waiting for Lefty (1935); and lastly, obsession with wealth and capitalism in Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes (1939). By exploring typical themes and subjects in American theatre of the 1920's and 30's, I hope to contextualize this time period for my analysis of The Hairy Ape.

Sophie Treadwell's Machinal was inspired by the 1927 trial of Ruth Snyder, a woman accused of killing her husband with her lover of three years. Snyder was

ultimately found guilty and sentenced to death by electrocution. Machinal is a powerful expressionist drama addressing the entrapment of women in sometimes loveless marriages during this time of oppression. Londré discusses gender as a major theme and subject in drama of this time period: “The second great area of decade-long concern might be called the role and capabilities of women” (72). She suggests that the changing role of women in the home and workforce provided inspiration for many plays:

Women’s issues are often linked with marriage. Wives, husbands, and their marriageable children question institutions dominated by money matters and devoid of the expected bliss. Why should a woman spend her days washing dishes when she has just as good a head for business as a man? (72)

It is especially interesting to view Young Woman (Helen), the main character in Machinal, as a victim – considering her conviction of murder in the first degree. In this play, all three sociocultural elements are present. Young Woman’s strife and oppression is caused by her position as a female in the 1920s: pressures to wed, expectations of a good wife, and the desire to be financially wealthy are socially constructed. Treadwell’s Expressionistic characteristics of repetitive dialogue, flat characters, and a subjective point of view aid the audience in seeing the plot through the eyes of Young Woman - experiencing society from one person’s subjective perspective. In her introduction to the 1993 edition of Machinal, Judith E. Barlow writes “Treadwell shows her protagonist confronting a phalanx of male characters with the power to determine her life. Again and again Helen complains of claustrophobia, a motif of entrapment that runs as a common thread” (viii).

Claustrophobia is indeed a common thread in the nine episodes of Machinal – as well as the entirety of O’Neill’s The Hairy Ape. Frequently, Young Woman pleads for some sort of emotional relief in her hard, mechanized world – only to be ignored. This brings the second element of sociocultural victimization into play: Young Woman both acknowledges and struggles against her oppression. Late in episode two, Young Woman considers marrying the Vice-President of her company – a man who she does not really love, but who is a decent man with a decent job. The Young Woman cries out to her mother: “But, I can’t go on like this, Ma – I don’t know why – but I can’t – it’s like I’m all tight inside – sometimes I feel like I’m stifling!” only to be dismissed in a cold, cruel fashion: “You’re crazy” (Treadwell 19). Young Woman fulfills this second element of sociocultural victimization when she murders her husband: the man she feels is responsible for keeping her caged. The actions that make up her struggle against victimization ultimately lead to further oppression: legal action and execution.

Ultimately, Treadwell’s piece is about the tragic end to a woman stuck in a loveless marriage of convenience in the brutal machine of a patriarchal society. This may sound like a timeless feminist statement on the oppression of women, and while it is, Treadwell’s Machinal also sits perfectly in the canon of plays from the 1920s with regard to the changing role of women. Victimization here is focused entirely on the one woman – reflecting both an Expressionistic means of creating setting/mood, and the struggles of the female gender during this time.

It is also arguable that Young Woman was too weak to survive in the system - that she is a victim of her own weakness and not society. Further, it’s arguable whether she is even a victim at all; could she simply be choosing the easiest way to get through life?

Could she not achieve all the freedom she wants if she only had the courage to fight for it? Young Woman fulfills the third element of sociocultural victimization when she endows society with the power to oppress her. While she actively protests her oppression and victimization, it is her willingness to succumb to society's pressures that lead to her demise. The grey area and subjectivity of victimization arises again here, but the Expressionistic literary devices employed by Treadwell help to quiet the argument against Young Woman as a victim. Stylistically, the piece focuses on Young Woman as a sympathetic victim, and I would only be straying from the focus of this study to argue otherwise. While gender oppression is not an issue with Yank in Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape, environmental oppression and claustrophobia certainly are, and I see many of Treadwell's same techniques used when I address The Hairy Ape in Chapter Five.

Langston Hughes's 1935 play Mulatto addresses race and class issues of the time period. Whereas Treadwell sets her Young Woman in a loud and mechanized urban environment, Hughes represents a rural plantation community. However, both plays detail oppression and alienation culminating in a violent act. The means of drawing attention to and creating victimization by socioeconomic and class issues are important to identify, as these same themes arise in The Hairy Ape, as well.

Hughes's protagonist is Robert, the 18-year-old mulatto son of a white plantation owner. He, too, is trapped in his social circumstances. His father, Colonel Tom, has sent him away to college to earn an education, yet when Robert returns home he must default to the subservient ways of a black man on a plantation. Robert becomes frustrated, and instead over-intellectualizes his problem to the point where animalistic violence takes over. He eventually kills his father and then himself. In her chapter "Playwrights and



Plays of the Harlem Renaissance” in A Twentieth-Century Companion to American Drama, Annemarie Bean offers historical reasoning behind this choice of protagonist:

[...]Stories of miscegenation were central to the fictionalization and dramatization of black life in the nineteenth century...Following the tradition of white authors, black playwrights continued to view acts of miscegenation as doomed, however much love is involved. (100)

Bean also notes that unlike most “tragic mulatto” stories, the mulatto character in Hughes’s play is male. She suggests that the visual juxtaposition of Robert and his father makes it all the easier for audience members to make a comparison of the two. Robert is frequently described as being “much like his father.” This visual juxtaposition falls into a common theme in theatre of this time period (including The Hairy Ape), as a visual representation of “good vs. evil” is key to creating victimization.

Throughout the play, Robert’s anger is attributed to an instance of mistreatment by his father at a young age. Several references are made back to “the beating” of Robert by Norwood, simply for addressing him as “father” in public. His father speaks to and about his black children as if they are someone else’s possessions, and continually denies any claim to them (he constantly refers to them as “Cora’s children.”) Mulatto very directly addresses these social/racial issues, and this mention might represent the shifting roles of African American characters in theatre. Societal treatment of a black person in the 1930s adds to this anger and the first element of sociocultural victimization is clarified. Robert’s strife is entirely brought upon him by his society and his family. Londré offers some historical insight: “While household servants are more often Irish

than black, African Americans increasingly appear as full-fledged characters over the years, especially with the growing interest in folk drama” (79).

The second element of sociocultural victimization (harm despite struggle/fight) runs throughout the entire script: Robert fights against his oppression by continually taunting his father: entering through the front door of the house and addressing him as an equal. Mulatto is an emotional rollercoaster, culminating in Robert’s father calling his son a “black bastard” (Hughes 24). Enraged, Robert strangles his father until he is dead. Interestingly enough, during this part of the struggle, Hughes writes in his stage directions that Robert “chokes the struggling white man until his body grows limp” (Hughes 24), *not* his “struggling father.” This is a noteworthy comment on the emotional alienation between Robert and his father – and representative of the black voice of the playwright.

Robert flees, but once he realizes his running is futile, returns home. He exchanges just a few words with his mother, notes his fatigue, and moves upstairs where he shoots himself with his father’s gun. This tale, while tragic, raises a number of social issues and concerns with a unique focus on the male mulatto as a well-rounded, three-dimensional character. Hughes does not employ the use of expressionistic setting and visual/aesthetic oppression to create victim (like Treadwell does), but instead creates victim by addressing the socioeconomic class structure of the time period. Although it can be argued that Robert endows his society with authority (it is my opinion that he struggles against it,) the first element of sociocultural victimization is the strongest here. A significant amount of focus is placed on Robert’s oppression by the class makeup of his society, with less attention being paid to the authority Robert instills in the system.

Whenever Robert and his mother discuss the way society treats him, the lament is for the social class structure, not Robert's supposed tolerance of that society. Robert's main complaint through the entire play is that the world treats him as a second-class citizen. The class structure of Robert's society is the strongest victimizer of all in the play. Eugene O'Neill uses this same technique in The Hairy Ape, creating a victimized protagonist out of an uneducated laborer in 1930s America.

Clifford Odets's 1935 play Waiting for Lefty is an inciting piece of Agit-Prop theatre. It has a simple political message meant to affect the masses of working-class, not necessarily educated people. This piece makes no apologies for its forward advocacy for workers' rights, or for speaking frankly about many financial and social issues that working-class citizens encountered. It's clear that Odets wanted this piece to be about working-class people, *for* working class people: he creates characters that are lesser developed, and his plot consists of several simple sketches or vignettes. Theatrical knowledge or experience is not a factor in comprehension of Odets's play. While The Hairy Ape lacks this simple vignette structure, O'Neill's use of a gruff and uneducated laborer as the protagonist makes it an accessible piece for this same demographic. In Chapter Four, I discuss Yank's dialect and socioeconomic standing as a laborer in the 1930s, the same position Odets's characters occupy.

In her chapter "Reading Across the 1930s" in A Twentieth-Century Companion to American Drama, Anne Fletcher positions Waiting for Lefty in the sociopolitical circumstances of 1935: "[it] falls neatly at the decade's halfway mark and aptly reflects the cultural moment. It is a polemic play advocating workers' rights" (114). The play is focused on a taxi drivers' strike and the union efforts to rally for the drivers' rights and

benefits, clearly bringing in the first element of sociocultural victimization: harm inflicted by outside forces. The economic conditions of the time period and labor industry inflict harm on several taxi drivers and their families through poor wages, long work hours, and a lack of job security.

The play begins at a taxi drivers' union meeting, where members are waiting for the official start of a vote for a strike: embodying the second element of sociocultural victimization. In the first few moments of the play's action, taxi drivers are already struggling against their oppression. As the drivers wait for an official ("Lefty") to arrive, conversation begins on the hardships each driver is facing. The next five of the play's seven episodes are flashbacks (vignettes portraying the hardship of specific taxi drivers and their families). Scene seven returns to the union meeting, where drivers, tired of waiting, face the audience and ask what to do.

The characters in Waiting for Lefty are blue-collar "everymen," with poor grammar, family troubles, and financial hardship (again, we will see this in The Hairy Ape's Yank). In one scene, Joe and Edna (a married couple) lament the repossession of their furniture for nonpayment. Edna mentions she put the children to bed early so that they wouldn't realize dinner wasn't being served. Is the same subjectivity of victim (chosen through the character's actions) seen here? I believe it is not. While Joe complains about the poor pay of a taxi driver, he is quick to mention there isn't any other work. I do not see any other viable recourse for Joe to recover financially, and find his victimization to be pure. This nearly eliminates the possibility of the third element of sociocultural victimization: an endowment of authority on the victimizer by the victim. In Waiting for Lefty, taxi drivers are attempting to overthrow the present authoritative

position. They are certainly not subversive to authority. In another scene, Sid and his girlfriend Flor discuss the sacrifices made to send Sid's brother to college (Sid mentions he never finished school himself). Alcoholism, arguments, and abuse are all present in the flashback with the constant threat of losing employment. The ever-present threat of unemployment hangs like a cloud over the middle episodes.

The play's final scene culminates in a chanting "call to action" that is the "benchmark of Marxist drama" (Fletcher 114). The taxi drivers are visibly agitated at the absence of Lefty, and tensions are coming to a head. Eventually, one by one, the taxi drivers stand and argue. They band together, face the audience and repeatedly chant "Strike!" Here, I see what might be the end of the passivity of these victimized characters who are finally taking specific action to repair their situation. While O'Neill addresses labor issues in The Hairy Ape, Odets crafts a collective notion of victim with the group of taxi drivers. While O'Neill's Yank is easy to relate to, Odets's drivers represent much more literally a broad group of people.

The 1920s and 1930s gave birth to a large number of plays concerned with financial strife and hardship. During this time period there was a great divide between the lower-class and upper-class, and the sheer number of Americans facing financial troubles led to an equally large number of plays with a focus on the evils of wealth and capitalism. In The Hairy Ape, we see this same juxtaposition between Yank (our gruff stokesman) and Mildred (the cruel wealthy waif who tours the bowels of the ship).

Lillian Hellman's The Little Foxes also demonstrates a focus on financial strife and hardship. It focuses on three siblings who are constantly attempting to get the better of each other in schemes to make money. While the play is at times comic, its core

message is the corrupting power of money and wealth, and the characters' actions are representative of their choice to value money over familial bond, emotion, or morality. The oppression of this family is inflicted by an outside force: the social class system, society's preference for wealth, and the family's obsession with money all culminate in the crumbling of a once-loving family. Anne Fletcher comments on the cruel acts each sibling performs in order to gain wealth:

Regina, the play's "villain," thinks nothing of withholding her husband's heart medicine and watching his struggle to reach for it, fall, and die. Her nephew, a lower-level bank employee, steals Regina's husband's investment bonds and gives them to her brothers to invest in the cotton mill, 'cutting her out'. (118)

The play details a number of schemes each character attempts: Regina, wanting to invest with her brothers in a new cotton mill, attempts to borrow money from her estranged husband Horace. She sends her daughter away to escort her husband home under the pretense of wanting to see him. Horace comes home, but refuses to lend Regina the money, so she convinces her nephew (who works at the bank) to steal bonds for her. It is clear that Regina is growing irritated of her sickly husband, and she callously tells him of her feelings:

Remember when I went to Doctor Sloan and I told you he said there was something the matter with me and that you shouldn't touch me any more? ... But you believed it. I couldn't understand that. I couldn't understand that anybody could be such a soft fool. That was when I began to despise you. (Hellman 212)

We see this same familial animosity between The Hairy Ape's Mildred and her aunt (to be further discussed in Chapter Five). Regina and Horace argue until tensions are at such a high that Horace experiences heart trouble. Regina sits and heartlessly watches as her husband dies in front of her, refusing to retrieve his medicine from upstairs. Later, Regina blackmails her brothers with the knowledge of the stolen bonds for three-fourths of the cotton mill investment. In The Little Foxes, the victim appears not to be an individual (like Young Woman in Machinal or Robert in Mulatto) nor a collective group of people (like the cabbies in Waiting for Lefty.) but the very nature of humanity. There is no struggle against this victimization: all of the characters have been so overcome by their endowment of authority on society's greed that they don't even recognize their strife. Money has turned a once-loving family into a cruel group of tricksters; their compassion has become the victim of wealth and greed.

Hellman's play dared to expose the greed of America's citizens without apologies in a much fiercer way than The Hairy Ape. In The Making of the American Theatre, Howard Taubman writes "No American playwright of our time had probed more devastatingly under the skin of a ruthlessly acquisitive society [than Hellman]" (236). Even so, The Hairy Ape does make its commentary (through the character of Mildred) on the evils of greed.

While each of these plays covers differing socioeconomic, political, cultural, and historical references and topics, The Hairy Ape touches on them all. In addition, all five plays include or explore the notion of hierarchy. A strong polarity between good and evil, wealthy and poor, or powerful and weak is essential to the concept of victimization in this time period, for without a clear delineation of black and white (even among grey

areas and blurred lines), the victim-making concepts of hardship, oppression, and authority cannot be as effectively portrayed.

Looking at each of the aforementioned plays, the figures of hierarchy and authority vary from individuals to institutions. In The Little Foxes, Regina actively victimizes her husband and her brothers actively victimize her through cruel manipulations in the name of money. Although there are power struggles between individual characters, the underlying “bigger picture” of hierarchy is that of wealth over poverty. There is a clear portrayal of the “easy life” of wealth, and how that position is more respected/revered/desired than that of the middle-class. We see this in The Hairy Ape with the cold Mildred and her aunt (they lack life compared to the gruff men in the stokehole.) In Chapter Five, I acknowledge the argument that a character could just as easily be a victim of wealth as a victim of poverty, but for the purposes of this time period in American sociocultural history, I equate “good versus evil” to “poor versus rich.”

In Waiting for Lefty, the span of hierarchy is also both literal and figurative. Each vignette features characters caught in a struggle with someone in a position of authority, generally their employer. Yet, we also see the socioeconomic battle between wealth and poverty. By the end of Waiting for Lefty, the taxi drivers have begun the process of turning the table with their strike. An underlying theme in this piece is leverage – either by bribery, a subordinate’s need for employment, or blackmail. Each character’s individual struggle, and the group struggle of the union as a whole, is determined by this leverage and is again replicated in The Hairy Ape as laborer Yank battles his socioeconomic superiors.



Mulatto's concept of hierarchy is an even broader topic: the hierarchy of race and class in 1930s America. Robert clearly struggles with his belief that he is equal to or better than his white father, but the plantation community in which he was raised clearly does not. His father's belief that the white race is superior to the black race couples with Robert's mother's own negative racial self-esteem in an effort to keep Robert in a place of lower status and authority. In The Hairy Ape, Yank also fights this self-perpetuating oppression. He spends several monologues lauding the work and life of a laboring stokesman and insulting the wealthy classes.

Of the discussed pieces in this chapter, Sophie Treadwell's Machinal has, arguably, the widest scope of hierarchy. Young Woman is not only oppressed by individuals – for instance, her mother and her employer; she is also oppressed by society's structure of gender hierarchy as a woman. Furthermore, Young Woman frequently complains of claustrophobia and the piece's overarching theme is the young woman lost in a mechanized world – crushed by the large “machine.”

Sociocultural victimization is prevalent in all of these pieces. Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape not only utilizes all of the previously mentioned literary devices for implementing sociocultural victimization, but all three of its elements, as well. I will spend chapters three and four analyzing The Hairy Ape's historical and theoretical significance as well as the techniques I have observed O'Neill employ in creating “victim.”

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE HAIRY APE IN CONTEXT**

In setting a contextualized stage for an analysis of Eugene O’Neill’s The Hairy Ape, I have established that American theatre of the 1920s and 1930s is based largely on a polarity of characterizations – black vs. white, good vs. evil, etc. O’Neill utilizes this same polarity - but what makes The Hairy Ape an ideal candidate for analyzing victimization? In his introduction to a collection of O’Neill’s early plays, Jeffrey H. Richards comments that “this story of natural man in a machine world remains one of the best-known of all American dramas from this period” (xliv). Best-known from this time period, yes - but why the best for studying victimization in this time period?

Chapter Two focused on the many forms of victimization in different plays of the 1920s and 1930s. Many of these works utilize only one or two means of victimization – but The Hairy Ape explores them all. In Chapter Five I will discuss O’Neill’s use of psychological, physical, literal, and figurative devices to form Yank’s victimization. I would like to use this time and this chapter to discuss the beginnings of The Hairy Ape – the animalistic qualities of its characters, its sense of polarity, and the circumstances under which it was written.

Up to the early 1900s, American theatre consisted of a blend of vaudeville performances and musical productions. With the growing popularity of film (not yet technologically advanced enough to have sound) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, theatre employed the use of music on a large scale and a focus on fame to compete in the entertainment market. While successful with the popular commercial theatergoers, it left artistic integrity and quality lacking, often repeating the stylistic choices again and again

without any experimentation. Beginning in 1914, a group of American directors, critics, and designers fed up with the theatre world's current philosophy formed the "new stagecraft," a collective devoted to championing artistic experiments. The "new stagecraft" held an emphasis on new art with European influences.

In Theories of the Theatre, Marvin Carlson calls the artists of the new stagecraft's publication *Theatre Arts* "their central critical voice" (361). He goes on to summarize their published manifesto ("What We Stand For"), explaining that it:

[...]Denounced commercialism, naturalism, and the star system, and called for a 'new race of artist-directors' who would consider 'well-written plays, or inspired acting or pretty settings' not as ends in themselves but 'only as contributions to a larger unity, a synthesis or harmony of all the lesser arts – a newer, truer art *of the theatre.*' (361)

Carlson describes the beginnings of a shift in theatrical value and artistic quality. Many of Eugene O'Neill's pieces, having come out of this time period, share the same focus on artistic quality and artistic community. The Hairy Ape is no exception.

In The Making of the American Theatre, Howard Taubman credits groups like these with "provid[ing] the bubbling activity that expressed a vast ferment underneath" (150). Increasing intercontinental travel brought a slew of exciting new theories from Europe, and America's artistic institutions came under attack as commercial, shallow, and flat. Here we see the beginnings of a shift in the artistic community that set the stage for O'Neill and his contemporaries.

Two coeditors of *Theatre Arts*, Kenneth Macgowan and Robert Edmund Jones, served with Eugene O'Neill as codirectors of the Provincetown Players. The Players can

be best described as a community of actors, directors, playwrights, and designers who dedicated themselves to the cultivation of new works, themes, ideologies, and voices for American Theatre.

O'Neill joined the group in 1916, working alongside George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell, Hutchins Hapgood, Neith Boyce, and Louise Bryant. In his years with the Players, O'Neill produced several plays, among them Bound East for Cardiff and Thirst. Jeffrey Richards tells a wonderful anecdote in his introduction to Eugene O'Neill: Early Plays that explains the production of both of these pieces. The Provincetown Players had converted an old wharf into a theatre space, and used this space to produce Bound East for Cardiff (a play about an injured soldier also named Yank). Later, the same wharf would house the opening of O'Neill's play Thirst – and on opening night a “timely fog gave the group a sense that in their midst was someone with the force to carry out their program of theatrical reform” (Richards xi).

It is impossible overlook the myriad of specifically European influences in American theatre of this timeframe, mostly due to the influx of European artists to America fleeing wartime dangers. As these artists traveled to America, they brought with them such avant-garde influences as Symbolism, Pataphysical Theatre, Futurism, Expressionism, Dada, and the Theatre of the Absurd. While elements of many of these styles are evident in The Hairy Ape, O'Neill clearly showcases its Symbolism and Theatre of the Absurd influences through its philosophical message.

The Hairy Ape is true to Symbolist fashion, in that its plot and meaning are not what it seems at first glance. From this perspective, the topic of the play itself is the validity, helpfulness, and usefulness of religion in the human struggle to find oneself and

a purpose in life. Yank's journey traces his search for his place in the world. Such a lofty topic could barely be breached in a play, let alone in "A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life," as labeled by O'Neill. The struggle had to be touched on in a metaphor—and what better than the brutality of an ape, the likening of a human to a Neanderthal, and the imprisoning class system that each member desperately desires to climb.

Socioculturally speaking, The Hairy Ape is the culmination of years' worth of writing before. With social issues in the labor industry, union organization, gender roles, racial/ethnic differences, and the economy all appearing in works of the time period, O'Neill's simple metaphor applies to all strife, yet offers no solutions. According to Richards, O'Neill "rejects all institutional solutions: capitalism may foster the conditions that divide human beings from themselves, but neither socialism, anarchism, nor any other social-political force can provide a ready answer" (xlv).

The Hairy Ape was written in 1921 and 1922, and traces the story of Yank, a gruff archetype working in the coal-dusted engine room of a steamboat. Yank's character (both physically and emotionally) lacks humanity in favor of a primitive animalistic image. In his stage notes, O'Neill describes Yank physically as a Neanderthal:

The men themselves should resemble those pictures in which the appearance of Neanderthal Man is guessed at. All are hairy-chested, with long arms of tremendous power, and low, receding brows above their small, fierce, resentful eyes. . . [Yank] seems broader, fiercer, more truculent, more powerful, more sure of himself than the rest. (358)

All of the men in the steamroom are primitively muscular from their work, but none so much as Yank. He stands out as the strongest, loudest, meanest, and most primal

of the men, and thus acts as their leader. It's important to note his physical description now – when we later meet with Mildred, a young wealthy woman on the ship, her physical description is the polar opposite of Yank's gruff and masculine appearance.

Emotionally, Yank is an adolescent. His moods swing violently from one end of the spectrum to the other, bringing him from a quiet sense of brooding (much like a child attempting deep thought) or pleasant humor to a vicious fury in just minutes. Early in Act One, Yank spends time with his co-workers, as indicated by O'Neill's stage notes: "Taking a gulp from his bottle – good-naturedly" (360). Just four lines later, after a drunken co-worker sings a few lines of a song, Yank explodes in a "fiercely contemptuous" rant: "Shut up, yuh lousey boob! Where d'yuh get dat tripe? Home? Home, hell! I'll make a home for yuh! I'll knock yuh dead" (361). This aggressive behavior further paints the picture of Yank as an ape, but adds a layer of the unexpected – Yank's moods are as tumultuous as the socioeconomic environment of this time period.

Early in the play, an indignant, wealthy waif of a woman, Mildred, comes down to the steamroom to witness the workings of the ship and stumbles upon one of Yank's loud emotional outbursts. She wears a pristine white dress, juxtaposed against Yank's filth; a classic black-and-white polarity is laid out in a literal fashion. Mildred brands him then and there with a horrified look, a loss of consciousness, and the exclamation "Oh, the filthy beast!" (O'Neill 373) from which Yank infers his new title as an Ape. He is indignant and offended - her comment brews in him for awhile. O'Neill's stage directions note that when the next scene starts, after dinner, Yank is the only laborer who has not cared to wash himself. He sits and thinks about what Mildred said, finally exploding with an accusation:

Hairy ape, huh? Sure! Dat's de way she looked at me, aw right. Hairy ape!  
So dat's me, huh? [*Bursting into rage – as if she were still in front of him.*]  
Yuh skinny tart! Yuh white-faced bum, yuh! I'll show yuh who's a ape!  
(376)

Yank is confused and panicked. Without lending any intellectual thought to his feelings, Yank decides the only way to win revenge is to enter into Mildred's world to prove her wrong. His emotion is an animalistic predatory instinct, fueling his trip up to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue with a comrade. He barely has a plan for what he hopes to accomplish, let alone what to do to accomplish it. As his angry mission continues, Yank attempts to communicate with the social elite on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and without much success, resorts to violence. He punches a stoic man in his face and is put in jail.

The Hairy Ape paints a horrible picture of what happens when a primitive being, trapped in an inhumane world, is left to escape to his own devices. Eventually, Yank escapes from prison, sneaks his way into the gorilla exhibit at the zoo and taunts the animal until it embraces him in a constrictor-like hug. The hug crushes Yank's chest, and he falls to the floor. Yank feels trapped by his circumstances and is unable to intellectualize the solution – in his last attempt to understand his surroundings, he finds death.

Yank's character lacks any human spirit, acting mostly on animalistic instinct and raw emotion. This sense of primitivism shows Yank in his most naked and natural state – without any thought or compassion. It is my opinion that the conscious choice to have a lack of humanity aids in making this character the “everyman” of the 1920's. During this time in American history, laborers in the steel and textile mill industries faced difficult

working environments, but despite his economic class, Yank at his core does not represent any one laborer or any one investor. He represents all naked, natural, timeless humanity during a time of strife. Yank, once his ignorance is lifted, is obsessively preoccupied with his status in life. Without the necessary intellectual experience/power/education, Yank cannot transcend this status and is miserable.

Ultimately, O'Neill offers no solution to Yank's problem. The wealthy are just as devoid of humanity as the laborers. Higher social classes experience just as many ills as the lower classes, yet it is clear that they cannot coexist in a Socialist Utopia. I support the theory that O'Neill broaches an existentialist ideology with the piece: Yank must create his own sense of meaning in his chaotic world (a world he has no hope of understanding). We see here a strong polarity between society and individual – yet another 1920s and 30s polar representation of “good versus evil”.

O'Neill creates a character incapable of higher thinking; Yank doesn't intellectualize his decisions or emotions. On several occasions he attempts to think (O'Neill's stage directions indicate several times that he sits in the position of “The Thinker”), but more goes through the motions than actually accomplishes much thought. Yank's repeated attempts (and failures) in his intellectual effort only support a hopeless view.

An effective literary device in creating both this symbolism and the sense of victimization is O'Neill's use of polarization. True to 1920s and 30s fashion, there is a clear juxtaposition of black-and-white, good-and-evil. O'Neill achieves this polarity on both a literal and figurative plane – through the characters and their representations.



This polarization is crucial to the creation of victim in this time period, for it creates the hierarchy of authority from which oppression is executed. As an example: Mildred, the wealthy woman who offends Yank, wears a pristine white dress – in stark contrast to blackened soot of the stokehole. She is pale, and porcelain – Yank is dirty and sweaty. These two characters are just one small set of stable categories that are represented in The Hairy Ape. In this metaphorical category, we can also see the struggle of an individual over his social class, the struggle of the poor over the wealthy, and ultimately, the struggle of mankind over existence.

In the Journal of Religion and Popular Culture, Professor John W. Presley writes that Yank is a man struggling for his place in creation. The play is a metaphor for the man's search for meaning and purpose throughout his life; Yank ultimately finds his at the gorilla exhibit at the zoo. Many critics consider the play to discuss the dehumanizing effects of industrialization on humanity. Yank loses his personality and humanity to the dirt, grime, and crassness of his position as a stokesman. Expressionist influences are notable here in the poignant portrait of the human condition—while being anti-machine, anti-industrialism, and anti-technology all at the same time.

The most pressing influence of European Avant-Garde theatre in O'Neill's The Hairy Ape is that of the Theatre of the Absurd, and O'Neill's work is an evident precursor to the movement's rise. Much like the myth of Sisyphus that inspired the movement, Yank is stuck in his reality. He is imprisoned by his position at work and his station in life, and it is hopeless to think he will transcend that position. In the opening stage notes, O'Neill writes that the effect of the set should be

A cramped space in the bowels of a ship, imprisoned by white steel. The lines of bunks, the uprights supporting them, cross each other like the steel framework of a cage. The ceiling crushes down upon the men's heads.

They cannot stand upright. (358)

The characteristics of imprisonment, hopelessness, and the absurdity of life on the planet are all classic characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd. In concrete literary devices, there is constant use of repetition as Yank's co-workers chide him with repeated "Think"s, "Love"s and "Law"s whenever he mentions the word. As Yank attempts to find the woman who labeled him a "filthy beast," and attempts to find his redemption, he encounters several barriers to his goal. After committing his 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue assault, Yank is faced with the theme of imprisonment—but in all too literal an expression. He bides his time in jail, and is eventually released to become a part of an underground and radical labor union to reclaim his purpose and fight in life.

It is to be noted that the majority of critics and viewers missed the religious undertone when critiquing the play. The overwhelming opinion of The Hairy Ape was that it had no meaning, but those that did glean a bit of message from it declared that the struggle was Yank's desire to climb the ladder of social enlightenment, not religious realization.

In his article, Professor Presley notes that "of contemporary reviewers, Walter Pritchard Eaton gets closest to the point when he says The Hairy Ape 'might almost be called an expressionistic tragi-comedy of modern industrial unrest'." The only other option might be to blend the European influences of this play and declare it a fusion of Absurdism, Symbolism, and Expressionism.

The Hairy Ape's relevance in this study is threefold: a clear-cut polarity of good-versus-evil which is representative of theatre of the time period, relevant social commentary on the laboring classes during a time of industrialization, and there a desperate search by a man for his meaning in the world all build on each other to position The Hairy Ape rightfully in the canon. I have established that The Hairy Ape is a perfect example of theatre of the 1920s and 30s, and that its polarity aids in creating victimization. The following chapter will focus on the specific literary devices (referenced in Chapters Two and Three) employed to create victim.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORING YANK'S VICTIMIZATION**

Through a thorough analysis of both the definition of “victim” and the different methods of inferring/creating sociocultural victimization within theatre texts, I have created a basic framework with which to view and understand hierarchy and authoritative status. Looking at Eugene O’Neill’s The Hairy Ape through this established framework allows me to better understand the historical, cultural, sociological, and artistic motivations and dimensions of Yank, as well as Eugene O’Neill’s skillful use of semiotics and suggestion to create a character that, despite his brash exterior, can become a sympathetic victim.

Most critical writings and discussions of The Hairy Ape discuss Yank as a victim of many things: his socioeconomic status, intellectual capability, and his psychologically stifling work environment. O’Neill maximizes these oppressions by way of character development, dialogue, and the physical environment itself.

If we are to assume that American Labor workers of the 1920s and 1930s (particularly in steel and textile mills) faced hardship and numerous struggles, it becomes easy to recognize the markers of Yank’s socioeconomic strife. His employment as a stokesman involves long, hard hours of manual labor in intense heat and confined spaces. O’Neill and his characters continually reference the discomfort of the stokehole. When Mildred is preparing to visit the area for the first time, her escort (an engineer) comments on how hot the bowels of the ship can be. Noticing that she is wearing a white dress, he questions her, reminding her that the stokehole is not only hot, but dirty. “You’ll likely

rub against oil and dirt. It can't be helped... There's ladders to climb down that are none too clean – and dark alleyways" (O'Neill 369).

Yank's difficult manual labor does not offer him wealth. Laborers in this time period were generally poorly paid and poorly educated; this is evident in O'Neill's craftsmanship of Yank's dialect. While difficult at times to read, Yank's speech clearly paints the picture of a poorly educated man who is neither well-spoken nor well read: "But yuh can bet your shoit noone aint' never licked me since! Wanter try it, any of youse? Huh! I guess not" (O'Neill 361). O'Neill is particularly adept at creating character through dialect, whether it be a laboring Irishman ["To the divil wid it!" (366)], or a heavily accented, gruff man named Long ["Ave we got ter swaller 'er hinsults like dogs?" (375)], Yank's dialect, along with his undesirable employment as a stokesman, makes his socioeconomic strife clear. While this doesn't necessarily make a fully sympathetic victim out of Yank, it helps to establish a base from which sympathy can build. This context also establishes foregrounds an element of sociocultural victimization: harm inflicted by society (in this case, class structure) on a character.

O'Neill's skillful ability to create sympathy for Yank becomes clear as he demonstrates how frequently Yank experiences considerable intellectual difficulty. While it can be inferred that he implies this in Yank's profession and manner of speech, it is more clearly represented in Yank's repeated attempts to think through his problems. Several times in the play, O'Neill's stage directions note that Yank "is seated forward on a bench in the exact attitude of Rodin's 'The Thinker'" (373). During his encounter with Mildred, we see evidence of another sociocultural victimization: the endowment of authority or power on the victimizer by the victim. Yank endows authority on Mildred

when he becomes upset with her reaction to him, giving her opinion validity. Yank has previously been brash and difficult to upset; it is almost surprising how much Mildred's reaction affects him. For all of his talk against the upper classes, Yank still endows her with authority by valuing her opinion and reception of him. He sits alone, attempting to process this event. When his comrades prod him, he responds with "Lemme alone. Can't youse see I'm trying' to tink?" (O'Neill 374). Amused, they echo after him in a cacophonous fashion, repeating "Tink!" again and again. The stage directions indicate their intent: "Repeating the word after him as one with cynical mockery" (O'Neill 374). He returns to his pensive position, only to be swept up in the repetitive dialogue to follow, as the crew parrots back a series of other words – love, law, governments, and God. The culturally recognizable sense of mockery by a group of peers is easy to sympathize with; at this point, audience members (and readers alike) may begin to feel for Yank as a human being.

Unable to thoroughly understand his situation, Yank becomes infuriated and declares that the only way to make things even with Mildred is to go visit her. Violent intentions are implied; however, not having thought his plan through, Yank only speaks of revenge. He declares that he'll "get her some way! Git offen me, youse guys! Lemme up! I'll show her who's a ape!" (O'Neill 378).

Yank being incited to action by his co-workers paints the picture of yet another oppressor, highlighting an element of sociocultural victimization through Yank's psychologically stifling work environment.

Yank's work environment isn't one that most would call healthy. While O'Neill paints pictures from time to time of a jolly brotherhood (the men joking, laughing, talking

about work and women), most of Yank's co-workers stifle him both emotionally and intellectually through mocking and insults. In addition, the frequency of drunken machismo leads to arguments and, at times, violence in the stokehole. O'Neill's characterization sets up some preconceived notions of Yank: an uneducated laborer who has an intellectual disadvantage. When his stifling, aggressive, and oppressive work environment comes into full view, sympathy for Yank becomes easier to argue for.

The opening scene begins with a series of statements and voices ringing through the stokehole. Some such statements are "Pass back that bottle, damn you!", "You're a bloody liar!", and "Say dot again!" (O'Neill 359). Stage directions indicate a commotion, and that "two men about to fight are pulled apart" (359). Yank has frequent arguments with one character in particular – Paddy, the "old, wizened Irishman" (O'Neill 360). Paddy makes a habit of reminiscing about old times in the old country – romanticizing the past. Yank is clearly not a fan of setting his current situation in any sort of context (or has no "better life" in the past to think of,) and responds with "Aw hell! Nix on dat old sailor ship stuff! All dat bull's dead, see? And you're dead, too, yuh damned old Harp, on'y yuh don't know it" (O'Neill 360). In moments like these, Paddy tends to quiet down, but the many other stokesmen are itching for a fight and prod Yank further.

As mentioned earlier, Yank repeatedly attempts to think through his situation. But whenever he asks his comrades to quiet down "Can't youse see I'm tryin' to t'ink?" (O'Neill 360), they respond with a mocking chorus of "Think! Think! Think! Think!". Sociocultural victimization is again reinforced through the oppression of Yank by an outside force, but we also see the beginnings of the second element in Yank's interactions with his co-workers: an acknowledgement of the victim through resistance and struggle.

Yank struggles against their mistreatment by flexing his authority and making threats, yet the taunting continues. They make fun of Yank, and tell him he isn't intelligent enough to think. Instead, they support an alcohol habit: "Don't be cracking your head wid ut, Yank. You gat headache, py yingo! One thing about it – it rhymes with drink! Ha, ha, ha! Drink, don't think! Drink, don't think! Drink, don't think!" (O'Neill 361). O'Neill indicates here that the men are speaking as a chorus, stamping their feet and pounding on benches in time to their chant. Here we see that Yank's desire to transcend his situation is beaten down by peer pressure, machismo, and alcohol.

Yank's comrades don't stop with drunken brawls and mocking choruses – political debates occur on the ship in the least intellectual of ways. Long, another stokesman, makes a speech early in the first scene about the oppression laborers experience under the "damned capitalist class" (O'Neill 361). Yank immediately fires back with personal insults against Long, calling him a coward and then declaring the superiority of laborers over "dem slobs in de foist cabin" (O'Neill 362). Their debates are broken and disjointed; there is no intellectual give-and-take. Yank simply declares his frustration, insults a co-worker, and then all normalcy resumes (drinking, laughing, and carrying on). It is clear that Yank's environment, as far as his peer group is concerned, is stifling and unhealthy for him. Discussions cannot be had without argument, arguments are frequent, and the alcohol is as prevalent as the machismo. O'Neill crafts an environment that prevents Yank from developing and/or growing as a human being..

But, is Yank a *victim*? He suffers economic hardship and unpleasant labor conditions. He is inarguably intellectually inferior to members of Mildred's social class, even though his childhood story and the quality of education offered to him in the past is



unclear. The first two elements of sociocultural victimization are clear in Yank's oppression by outside forces (his society, co-workers, the class system) and struggle against them. Is it fair, then, to say that Yank is a victim based solely on this information? It can be argued as such, but I believe that O'Neill's choice of physical setting contributes to the shaping of Yank not only as a victim but a sympathetic victim. At this time, Yank is simply an uneducated laborer in 1930s America – a sort of caricatured everyman of the lower class and a character any other playwright could create without achieving full victimized status.

Instead I assert that O'Neill's expert craftsmanship of settings and character relationships determine Yank's level of victimization. While, upon analysis, Yank's psychological environment is oppressive, O'Neill's skillful use of suggestion rounds out the portrait of Yank's existence to create a fully sympathetic victim. O'Neill employs many modes of oppression (socioeconomic, physical, etc.) to create this well-rounded victim; the many literary devices employed (and the skill with which they are used) lead me to believe that O'Neill intended Yank to be perceived as a victim.

As discussed in Chapter Two, one method a playwright may employ to develop a sense of victimization is the creation of oppression. Oppression can be experienced in both psychological terms (the audience or main character(s) experiencing confusion, tension, or discomfort) or in physical terms (the actual setting of the piece with suggestive imagery or the demonstration of physical pain). In the case of physical oppression the creation of these emotions leads directly to confusion or discomfort – the aforementioned psychological terms.

O'Neill is a master of oppressive environments. His mastery can be seen in The Hairy Ape in both the setting of the stokehole and the wealthy 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Scene One's opening stage directions indicate that

The treatment of this scene, or of any other scene in the play, should by no means be naturalistic. The effect sought after is a cramped space in the bowels of a ship, imprisoned by white steel. The lines of bunks, the uprights supporting them, cross each other like the steel framework of a cage. (358)

This imagery instantly connotes oppression and victimization to the audience, suggesting that the stokesmen are captives on the ship. As much as Yank might laud the noble laborer, it is also arguable that the stokesmen are held captive in their profession and economic status. Despite the occasional praise of hard labor (and mockery of the upper class,) it is difficult to believe that any stokesman prefers his line of work to wealth. The cage-like setting combines with the loss of humanity and animalistic qualities of the characters to further propel a sense of captivity.

O'Neill goes on to describe the effect this environment should have on the characters: "The ceiling crushes down upon the men's heads. They cannot stand upright" (358). This is symbolic of Yank's inability to process his situation, successfully complete a thinking session, or understand his position in life as it relates to others. He cannot stand upright. He cannot grow, or learn, or understand. He is stifled.

The ceiling crushing down upon the men's heads might be representative of the so-called "glass ceiling" – the name given for the discriminatory oppression that prevents minorities (usually women) from advancing in a given organizational hierarchy. Both

physical and psychological oppression is inferred in the set design with its symbols of imprisonment. This can be very effective for audiences who may have entered the theatre with preconceived notions about the play's title, The Hairy Ape. Immediately upon the opening of the curtain, the cage-like set design appears and the metaphor becomes clear. Making this metaphorical distinction in the first scene allows for the reveal of the ape cage in the zoo (in the final scene) all the more poignant. Audiences have seen Yank's ape-like attitude, circumstances, and even fate as the entire play progresses, and when he arrives at the zoo in the final scene, we have come full circle to a total sense of sympathetic victimization.

Furthermore, the oppressive and jail-like setting creates a sense of sympathy toward all of the stokesmen. They are loud, crude, vulgar, brash, and aggressive men – not a typical sympathetic character design, but their cage-like setting immediately creates a reason to feel pity for them. The setting alone makes the case for the men's suggested educational deficiencies and lack of socioeconomic benefits. These men are not here because they've chosen to be; they are here because that's where society has sent them. Yank becomes more developed as the play progresses, but even his supporting characters fulfill the first element of sociocultural victimization by representing a group of people oppressed or victimized by an outside force.

What is most ingenious about this setting (and the attempted growth of Yank throughout the play) is that it immediately silences all arguments against sociocultural imprisonment or stagnancy. An easy counter-argument to the hardships of the working class is the classic "American Dream," "rags-to-riches" story where any man working hard enough can transcend his social status. O'Neill immediately makes this argument

invalid with the sense of imprisonment. These men are here against their will, and the sense of victimization is set.

Oppression and victimization is not only crafted in the hellish stokehole. Yank experiences many of these same conditions and circumstances on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue when he confronts the cold upper class. Whereas the stokehole was more oppressive in an aggressive, animalistic, threatening sense, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue is oppressive in a quieter, subtler way. Here, we see victimization and threat in the blank faces of people (the upper class) who have lost all humanity. They are a faceless army.

Demonstrating the struggle against his victimization, Yank charges up to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in a misguided attempt to “get even” with proper society and is faced with the bored and stoic masses. Yank, King of the Stokehole, comfortable with enclosed spaces, and master of coal, is suddenly standing on the side of a very open street. He is exposed and vulnerable. There are no small places for him to hide. This setting is uncomfortably clean for our stokesman, and Yank’s comment on the sidewalk where they stand is “Clean, ain’t? Yuh could eat a fried egg offen it” (O’Neill 379). By now, the understanding of victim has allowed the perception of this scene to be that of a sad man lost in a world he does not understand. Oppression, authority, and historical fact have now combined to draw understanding and pity.

Yank stands on the sidewalk with his buddy Long to keep him company. They make awkward, choppy conversation and we are briefly let into a small piece of Yank’s story: his upbringing in the church with a strict father who worked along shore. O’Neill’s craftsmanship of setting and peer group has already created compassion for Yank. The addition of his sad (presumably violent) upbringing cinches it.

Long and Yank discuss Mildred's treatment of him yet again, and Yank's anger begins to rise. There is a brief, but intense exchange between the two about social class, capitalism, and what exactly Yank intends to do to Mildred when he has the opportunity. It is at this point in the play where the third element of sociocultural victimization comes to full fruition: the endowment of authority on the victimizer by the victim. Over the course of the play, Yank's endowment of authority on Mildred has created a brewing resentment and anger. Rather than brushing her off, Yank decides that her opinion (and that of the entire upper-class) is valuable. They must be proven wrong. Long, surprisingly, encourages Yank to be thoughtful and careful about his approach, but Yank refuses, arguing that Long is "yellow, dat's what. Force, dat's me! De punch, dat's me every time, see!" (O'Neill 381). At the height of his frustration, church lets out, and floods of churchgoers empty onto the streets. O'Neill has very specific stage directions for the crowd:

The women are rouged, calcimined, dyed, and overdressed to the nth degree. The men are in Prince Alberts, high hats, spats, canes, etc. A procession of gaudy marionettes, yet with something of the relentless horror of Franksteins in their detached, mechanical unawareness. (381)

The crowd is so inhuman that it only incites the already agitated Yank. Despite his best efforts, Yank cannot get a single one of them to react to or even acknowledge him. He asks women to accompany him back to the boiler room. He insults several others, calling them unattractive: "Go hide yuhself before de horses shy at yuh" (O'Neill 382). He remains in the center of the sidewalk, cat-calling the women and bumping into men. Yank is frustrated, and cannot understand why he is being ignored. He resorts to

yelling obscenities. Yank is desperately seeking a reaction from the crowd, who he has endowed with a significant power by valuing their opinion. With his exasperation and aggression at an all-time high, he is delighted when a gentleman bumps into him trying to run and catch a bus. Yank smells a fight, and hits the man directly in his face. The man is slightly angered, not because of the violence, but rather because he has now missed his bus. He offers no cathartic response to Yank's violence, other than a polite "I beg your pardon" before calling the authorities over. Yank is locked up in a jail cell – a cage fit for a gorilla at the zoo.

And again, the cage-like setting of a jail cell is brought onstage. In the entirety of the play, only two scenes take place outside of a cage-like setting: Mildred and her aunt on the deck of the ship, and Yank exposed on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. By this time, a mixture of comfort/relief and disappointment occurs when we see Yank behind bars again. He was clearly unfit for the open world, yet his imprisonment reflects his failure.

O'Neill also helps to paint Yank's victimization with his oppressive relationships to other characters. While this method is certainly not as powerful as the physical settings of the play (or the chanting and mockery of his co-workers), it provides a psychological undertone perfectly suitable for the psychological oppression in this play. In the opening of The Hairy Ape, Yank appears to be the leader of the stokesmen – the alpha male. O'Neill makes this clear with his opening stage directions:

He seems broader, fiercer, more truculent, more powerful, more sure of himself than the rest. They respect his superior strength – the grudging respect of fear. Then, too, he represents to them a self-expression, the very last word in what they are, their most highly developed individual. (358)

As the opening scene continues, Yank repeatedly barks at the other men and they silence themselves immediately. He steals their alcohol without protest: “He takes a tremendous gulp at one of them; then, keeping the bottle in his hand, glares belligerently at the owner, who hastens to acquiesce in this robbery” (O’Neill 359). For the duration of the first scene, Yank is in control of how the men speak and what they speak of.

As the play progresses, the amount of power he actually holds over himself and others becomes quite clear. After Mildred faints at his sight, his grip on authority begins to slip. His co-workers mock him more frequently, he sits quiet and depressed, and his fiery aggressiveness appears to have dulled. Yank has lost control of his life, endowing not only his co-workers, but the upper class with the power to frustrate him and the power to create doubt in his beliefs. We, having accompanied him on his journey, feel a sense of sadness for the clarity Yank has lost. We began with pity for him, and despite his brashness, hope for the best. Yank is unable to keep control of his situation on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and when placed in jail, has hit bottom.

Ultimately, the only way for Yank to take control back (from fate, society, and the upper-class) is to accost the very animal that represents his problems – the gorilla at the zoo. He attempts to gain some authority over the animal, and releases it from its pen. The gorilla reciprocates by embracing Yank in a rib-crushing hug before flinging his body into its cage. Even in this desperate last act of understanding, Yank has failed.

Through both psychological and physical means, O’Neill has crafted a poignant piece of theatre that addresses victimization on all dramatic levels. At the end of the script, we have no choice but to sympathize with Yank. O’Neill creates sociocultural victimization through victimization by outside forces, fights and struggles against

oppression, and endowment of authority on victimizers by the victims: making The Hairy Ape the ideal example of “victim” during this time period in American theatre.



## **CHAPTER SIX: COMPLICATING A CONTEMPORARY VICTIM**

Through the course of this study, I have established the very beginnings of a framework for understanding, exploring, and creating victimization. I have applied this framework to several noteworthy plays from the 1920s and 30s with the aim of fully exploring The Hairy Ape in terms of its context and victimization. But to what end? Why is it useful to even understand where the notion of victim has been, and how it has been created in the past, unless we look at where the notion of victim has since gone? What techniques exist now, and how have they changed? What do these changes do to the notion of “victim”? These are broad questions, and there have been decades between O’Neill’s time and now. I feel the best means of beginning to answer these questions is to look at nonlinear contemporary theatre - the polar opposite of 1930s realism in terms of character development, structure, and plot.

In my attempt to address these issues and begin navigating nonlinear contemporary theatre, I begin with Elinor Fuchs’s work in The Death of Character. If character is dying or has died as Fuchs might suggest, and clear linear plotlines are being abandoned for representation and imagery, what does this do to the concept of victim? While Fuchs makes no direct commentary on levels of status, authority, or victimization in her dramaturgy, she does discuss the blurred lines of definition that are a byproduct of this style of theatre as well as changing characters and environments in the nonlinear/nonrealistic theatrical environment of today. I must also consider the changing styles of characterization, and the “shades of grey” evident in victims of contemporary work – the once clear-cut sense of “good vs. evil” is gone.

If blurred lines of gender, character, role, and intention are present in the works of today, how can victim be truly created, inferred, or analyzed? Is there a strong sense of polarity? Do elements of sociocultural victimization still exist? While detailed and appropriate to realistic works, my framework and methods of implementation from Chapter Two of this paper do not fit here. The framework must be adjusted.

Elinor Fuchs's 1996 The Death of Character is subtitled "Perspectives on Theater after Modernism," but really, the piece discusses theatrical theories and trends surrounding character dating back to Aristotelian teachings. Fuchs discusses the decline or loss of the fully formed character in contemporary theatre, and explains the different stylistic or artistic methods used in place of this fully formed character. The theatre she discusses is diverse, and does not subscribe to one ideology, rather; is a pastiche and collage comprised of images, sounds, symbols, and silence.

While much of Fuchs's studies focus on European artists (and most notably, the avant-garde movements born out of Germany,) she does discuss several specific American artists: Robert Wilson, Elizabeth LeCompte, Meredith Monk, Stuart Sherman, and the members of the Wooster Group. Fuchs cites these artists as support for the statement that "Theater is de-theologizing itself, doubting speech, voice, character, self, presence. We are looking at the end of drama and the emerging form of a post-metaphysical theater" (90). She cites a production of Act and the Actor by Daryl Chin, the entire plot structure of which is made up of "long passages of art criticism or theory" (78), an actor known simply as "the Reader" explaining the play's creation, and quotes from film noir. This marks an interesting trend – the loss of the traditional, "well-made" plot and character.

Without a linear course of action, obstacles to overcome, and revelations to be had, how can we identify with or care about a given character? I'll refer back to my anecdote regarding the Harry Potter series: if I am never attached to a given character, what will take its place for me? Even if the character themselves is never fully described, or even named, at least we can connect to the trials and obstacles of a conventional plotline.

The answer to these concerns is the use of a sociocultural imagery; a sort of Jungian cultural dictionary. Much contemporary theatre offers a collage of cultural images and sounds for interpretation. This structure makes contemporary theatre more of an experiential poem than a story, and characters symbols rather than people. Fuchs mentions that "The weaving of fragments never coalesces into an illusionistic reality with plot and characters, yet creates a sense of coherence because the intertexts are part of the spectator's cultural narrative" (78). "Victim" must become an *idea* in this theatre – not a *character*. This idea relies heavily on a full understanding of the "cultural narrative" of the audience for which a play is written/performed, and does not implement a polarity of authority or elements of sociocultural victimization. Instead, it appears that victim must be created by drawing on the predetermined emotional reactions of the audience. Victim has been a subjective term throughout this entire study, but now it appears that victim in contemporary nonlinear theatre must be crafted individually for each subjective audience.

The Death of Character provides enough insight to constitute an entire thesis in itself, with a large amount of her focus spent on the loss of the well-made plot (and embrace of the non-linear and non-realistic form,) but for the purposes of this research I will focus on Fuchs's specific statements about the constitution of "character". The

unraveling of the traditional characterization can be seen in her discussion of two specific devices: the multiplicity of characters (actors performing two or more characters just as much as one character serving different roles throughout the course of a play) and the use of characters to represent an idea as opposed to a person.

Any reader of theatre can easily point out several instances where one actor may portray several different roles, but the majority of these roles will be double-cast supporting characters whose faces are easily forgotten: for instance, one man may play both “the waiter” and the “the bellman” in a given play if these characters are not central to the main plot. Most audience members would hardly notice. It takes a reader of contemporary/avant-garde theatre, however, to recollect instances where an actor is prescribed to portray more than one major role by the playwright.

Take, for example, Jean-Claude van Itallie’s work The Serpent, created in 1968 in collaboration with Joseph Chaikin’s Open Theatre. The scene entitled “The Curses” dramatizes God’s discovery of Adam and Eve in Eden shortly after eating from the Tree of Knowledge. The voice of God is portrayed not from an actor onstage (or the obvious amplified voice-over,) but through each character. Van Itallie’s stage directions indicate that

Suddenly, an actor who has been playing one of the creatures in the garden pulls Adam up from under the arms. Adam speaks for God when God is speaking to Adam. When speaking for God, Adam uses a voice which is larger and more resonant than his usual one, and the actor who lifts him mouths the same words. Adam’s own attitude, as he speaks for God, is one

of surprise and dismay. Whenever God will speak, all the actors on stage will whisper his words too. (36)

It takes quite a suspension of disbelief to believe that our actor portraying a well-known figure has suddenly become a different character. In this case, it works well due to most spectators' understanding of "God" – a fluid, omnipresent deity. Victimization can be inferred here by the cultural understanding of "God" versus "the devil," and by the use of the well-known Creation story. But without a defined "devil" character, where are the authority lines? There are none here – I cannot declare a victim or victimizer in this piece, and so my third element of sociocultural victimization (authority endowed on the victimizer by the victim) cannot be applied. Instead, an inferred sense of authority is given by the use of God. For this piece, victimization has become a suggestion rather than a literary device.

While this characterization works well for the purposes of portraying an omnipotent deity with the power to "possess" a body, it does not translate as easily to the portrayal of multiple characters on a seemingly realistic plane. With a nonlinear, but more realistic storyline, can victim be created in a more obvious fashion? A particularly distinctive example is a work by Reza Abdoh (to whom Fuchs dedicated The Death of Character.) The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice. Abdoh takes the story of Orpheus and Eurydice and twists it into a nonlinear puzzle: the piece traces many characters (the feminine characters are portrayed by male actors, and vice-versa,) who continually shift and change their role from scene to scene. There is nothing even resembling a linear plotline; characters die in each scene and then appear in the next as if nothing has happened. Is our sense of victim, then, restricted to the actions in each scene? Or are we

left to infer victim from what we know of the classic Greek myth? I find that with non-linear, collage-like plays, my lens for analyzing sociocultural victimization does not have to be simply refocused – it has to be broken entirely. Without a linear plotline, it is nearly impossible to identify a victim and victimizer, and note struggle against oppression, or even identify that the victim is harmed or oppressed by an external force. With each actor representing many different themes, ideas, or characters, a direct analysis of one character's actions against another is impossible.

Fuchs discusses another changing application for the use of character: the choice to have actors represent ideas or ideologies rather than fully-dimensional people. Can we find victim here? Of course, we can see this in any play with a gross caricature of any stereotype – even Minstrelsy. I do not mean these representations, rather; the use of a character to represent an emotional image from the above-mentioned cultural dictionary. An example: Fuchs cites Stuart Sherman's productions of Hamlet and Stuart Sherman's Chekhov. Both of these productions were based on well-known plays or people, and this audience recognition was relied upon for literal imagery to function. Fuchs discusses a staging choice in Chekhov, where Sherman made a group of cherry trees cut out from fabric/paper the central focus onstage. Characters pale in comparison to the striking image of these trees, on the surface of which was printed text from Chekhov's plays.

Fuchs points out that

The very literalness of these images – presenting not characters writing, but the activity of writing itself, and not allusions to texts, but the very texts themselves – opens a stranger gap in the structure, or the

anticipation, of theatrical presence than any we have yet encountered.

(80)

She further explores the ramifications these clear, literal, conceptual representations have on audience members, suggesting that by using these simple representations in well-known plays, audience members are forced to question “where – if anywhere – the ‘real’ play resides” (80). If audience members are searching for the “real” play, then are they also searching for the “real” victim? This might be easier to connect – if actors portray ideas (not a character writing, but the activity of writing itself,) than the activity/idea might have a connotation useful to creating victim.

For example, if one of Sherman’s characters represented the activity of murder, or oppression, could we not find victim or victimizer in that character onstage? I believe we could, but that the three elements of sociocultural victimization do not apply.

Contemporary, nonlinear theatre may draw on audience’s preconceived opinions about the levels of authority, harm, and oppression that exist in the idea of murder, but these elements cannot be prescribed or demonstrated through character development and plotline alone. This brings me back to the concept of “good versus evil” – could victim be created in this style if some characters portrayed an activity of creation – painting, for example – and others portrayed an activity of destruction? We do not necessarily need Character A to destroy Character B’s painting to create victim – we can simply *suggest* the act of destruction. From this suggestion, the audience member can think about one of many storylines that would fit this general ideology, and victimization could be created.

So where has “good versus evil” gone in the last fifty years? Fuchs touches on the tip of the answer in The Death of Character’s Chapter Six, “When Bad Girls Play Good

Theaters.” This chapter is focused mostly on gender studies in the world of contemporary theatre and the issue of offensive material in female performances, claiming that once-offensive female performers used to succeed in confusing and frightening their audiences – challenging their notions of theatre, of “female”, and of “art”. As performance art grew, and boundaries of what could be considered “in good taste” expanded, audiences now attended these same performances with the expectation of offense. The shock was gone. It seems that with the blurring of good and evil, the sense of good versus bad artistic taste has blurred, as well.

While this might seemingly apply little to the sense of victimization, I would like to consider what it says about the once clear-cut concept of “good” and “evil.” Many of the plays discussed in this paper – Waiting for Lefty, The Hairy Ape, The Little Foxes – all hinge their sense of sympathy and victimization on the concepts of good versus evil. Greed versus love, acceptance versus social status, and power versus labor are all central themes. The success of these works may be owed to the timelessness of this struggle and the clarity of character; without them the elements of sociocultural victimization I focus on cannot be accurately portrayed.

When audiences cease to be shocked, offended, or made uncomfortable by the cultural shift Fuchs indicates, how can good and evil be represented? It would seem that the representations of good and evil must be exaggerated to such a degree that the audience experiences the shock they once felt.

Keeping in mind that we have discussed contemporary theatre’s use of audience reaction, understanding, open-ended questions, blurred character, nonlinear plot structure, and use the of cultural imagery, it seems that victim cannot be *determined* in these avant-



garde works of today – only *inferred*. True, many of the works from the 1920s and 30s discussed in this paper have blurred lines and themes, but they rely on a realistic plot with solid characters to create sociocultural victimization. Contemporary nonlinear theatre also has these blurred lines and concepts, but to a much deeper degree. There is no polar determination of good or evil, but only suggestion. This method of inferring victim is incredibly subjective for each audience member or reader – so how can it possibly be analyzed? I believe that the answer lies in the two ways victimization can be suggested - internally (through the character and their actions) or externally (plot-driven, suggested through balances of authority and power.)

It is easy to see how nonlinear plays with collages of imagery can connote or infer victimization or authority just as any other emotion. I see a greater challenge in finding victimization in seemingly linear contemporary plays that have blurred characterization. Griselda Gambaro's Stripped and David Mamet's Oleanna, while both have linear plotlines, exemplify the blurred lines of characterization and moral ambiguity without the benefit of cultural imagery or a clear-cut emotional through-line.

For the purposes of this discussion, I must expand my analysis to Latin American playwrights - I believe Stripped is simply too perfect of an example of inferring victim through character and actions that I cannot possibly exclude it from my study. Stripped was written in response to and as a commentary on Argentina's "Dirty War" (1976-1983.) Gambaro's genre "teatro grotesco" – grotesque theatre – includes the themes of terror, oppression, violence, and political crisis. We have already analyzed the various methods by which realistic playwrights of the 1920s and 30s can create victim, as well as Eugene O'Neill's masterful use of nearly all of these methods. I focus on Gambaro

because she skillfully employs *only* psychological oppression in a semi-linear, semi-realistic piece to create a sense of sociocultural victimization in her main character.

This two-character play offers no names: they are simply “woman” and “young man”. The woman, an actress, has arrived in an office for an audition. The entire play is a monologue – her nervous remarks as she waits in the room. After a while, “young man” enters the room. Gambaro indicates in her stage directions that “His manner is depersonalized, as if he were dealing only with objects, including the woman, to whom he is indifferent” (98).

The young man, always silent, periodically enters the room. At first, he takes pieces of furniture – a table, a chair. When he returns, he takes her coat. A bit later, he brutally rips her earring out of her ear and leaves with it. When he returns a fourth time, the woman, fearing more violence, takes off her skirt and offers it to him. By the end of this increasingly violent story, the room is empty and the woman is nearly naked. During the course of this treatment, the woman continually speaks of “Pepe,” her boyfriend or husband. It is clear that Pepe abuses her both physically and mentally as she recounts covering up bruises with makeup, being called a “foghorn,” and frets about making it home on time to cook his dinner – she fears being late.

Both literally and figuratively, the young man tears her apart piece by piece. Her home is no safe place for her, either, but at the end of the play when she is being taken away for some unspeakable, undisclosed horror, she surprisingly calls out for Pepe. In her article “The Abstract Allegory of Griselda Gambaro’s Stripped”, Ana Elena Puga discusses this futility and victimization:

No matter how eagerly she complies with the wishes of the Young Man, to the extent of removing her own skirt and handing it to him, the situation never evolves into the sort of happy scenario she desires...Catharsis is denied the spectators, who might leave the theatre sensing that the horror is not yet over for them either. (420)

The spectators are never offered a “traditional,” fully-formed character and they never witness the brutality in the back rooms of the office or at Woman’s home, yet the victimization is clear – created solely from Woman’s musings and the young man’s periodic actions.

While an element of sociocultural victimization is present (harm inflicted on the victim by an outside force,) others are curiously missing. Woman does not struggle or fight against her oppression. She does acknowledge it, but interestingly enough, the woman will from time to time make excuses for both Pepe and the young man. Here we see the same subjectivity of victim discussed in Chapter Two, and an element of sociocultural victimization. Woman passively allows herself to be a victim, by endowing both Pepe and the Young Man with the power to abuse her. She does not protest. She blames herself for making Pepe wait for his dinner, or for speaking too loudly, and wishes she didn’t frustrate him to the point that he is upset with her. As the young man enters and leaves the room, the woman (desperately searching for some sort of hope or happy ending) justifies his actions, supposing that he is so busy and/or important that he must be brief and curt with her. This cyclical sense of denial is much like Stockholm Syndrome, or the justifications of women in abusive relationships – making continual excuses for their abuser. Diana Taylor offers an explanation for this in her book Holy

Terrors: “[Stripped] brutally depicts the escalation of violence during a period of political crisis and the inanity, even ‘frivolity’ of the public’s response” (18).

While the denial of any wrongdoing and explaining away of violent brutality is certainly a motivator behind the actions of Woman, I believe they are also an indication of the mindset of Argentinean people in this time period – a sort of defense mechanism. Woman must make excuses for Pepe and the young man because, in reality, she has nowhere else to go. There is no hope of “better” for her, and her justifications enable her to continue living. During one series of musings, she accepts that there is “nothing now, except Pepe’s blows...and Pepe’s love” (Gambaro 102). Gambaro flawlessly touches on a cultural understanding to fortify her creation of victim through psychological means.

Without any formal sort of authority in the characters (it can be presumed that “young man” is simply an office clerk, a worker bee,) and only Woman’s rambling, neurotic speeches, a clear sense of victimization is created through the inferring of oppression and brutality. The young man only physically accosts the woman once: to rip out her earring. The positioning of this violent act (and its unexpectedness) instantly creates a sense of victimization. Through psychological oppression and one lone physical act, victim is created. The only barrier to fully realizing the oppression and victimization in Stripped is the woman’s continual acceptance of and excuses for the way she is treated. Gambaro relies on the audience to take sympathy and understand the psychological mindframe of the oppressed Argentinean people to fully realize the emotional intention of this play.

Having discussed one of the two ways victimization can be suggested - internally (through the character and their actions), I wish to focus now on the external means of

creating victim. As mentioned above, by “external,” I mean plot-driven ideas, suggested through balances of authority and power not in character, but in situation. We have already seen contemporary nonlinear theatre implement an inference of victim through culturally framed themes and ideas. If a linear plotline employs the same culturally recognizable themes, but with blurred characterizations, can sociocultural victimization still be effectively portrayed?

The answer to this question is the crafting of a culturally recognizable situation where authority/power is expected. David Mamet’s 1992 Oleanna positions Carol, a student, against her up-for-tenure professor, John. Written during the famous Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings (which brought attention to gender inequities and sexual harassment in the United States,) Oleanna questions the power struggle in a sexual harassment scandal. Mamet utilizes moral ambiguity in creating sympathy for both characters – it is equally easy to sympathize with either one – and in doing so, makes the storyline/situation itself the means to creating victimization.

Carol sits in John’s office, waiting to discuss her failing grade in one of his classes. John is troubled about his pending tenure and purchase of a home. He attempts repeatedly to discuss his teaching philosophy, fondness for her, and the subject matter of his book, but Carol only meets his pedantic and scattered explanations with confusion. John speaks down to her on several occasions by interrupting her and correcting her. Her frustration escalates to a point where John becomes frustrated and/or uncomfortable, and offers to grant her an “A” in the course (which is only halfway through its term) if she would agree to his terms:

If you will come back and meet with me. A few more times. Your grade's an "A." Forget about the paper. You didn't like it, you didn't like writing it. It's not important. What's important is that I awake your interest, if I can, and that I answer your questions. (Mamet 19)

Through the culturally recognizable situation of professor versus student, an authority distribution is assumed, with John holding higher power over Carol. My third element of sociocultural victimization is not completely implemented here; neither character endows the other with authority. Rather, it is society that determines authority and power, not the victim or victimizer. Mamet's victimization is not fully created here, but hinted at – with audiences (most likely) feeling sympathy for the struggling Carol. By the end of Act I, audiences *think* they know where power balances lie – but then Mamet's moral ambiguity begins to bloom.

Act II opens with our flustered professor meeting with Carol. He is offended and upset to have been brought up by the "Bad Tenure Committee" (Mamet 18) on charges of sexual harassment/misconduct. Carol's report to the tenure committee details the earlier meeting in a much more oppressive light:

*(He reads.)* He said he 'liked' me. That he 'liked being with me.' He'd let me write my examination paper over, if I could come back oftener to see him in his office. (Mamet 31)

John continually appeals to Carol for any way to make amends, but ultimately their discussion escalates into an argument, and he physically attempts to restrain her from leaving. Carol protests, John lets go, and Act II closes. Here is where Mamet's ambiguity begins to shine – audience members may still hold onto sympathy for Carol, but hints of

her true amount of authority/power are beginning to show. “Victim” is beginning to be turned on its head.

We have seen John as the aggressor/more powerful figure in Act I, and Carol reclaiming that authority in Act II. John makes a final appeal to Carol in Act III, where they begin arguing immediately over semantics – whether to refer to John’s actions as “accusations” or “proven facts.” Carol takes a vicious turn toward the end of the act, toying with John by offering to retract all of her accusations. As John questions her for the terms of her retraction, Carol academically needles him much as he needled her in Act I (flexing her authority once again) before disclosing that “her group” (presumably a feminist organization on campus) would like him to remove a number of patriarchal books (including his) from the university’s library. In Carol’s words, “We want it removed from inclusion as a representative example of the university” (Mamet 45). Carol threatens the now cowering John even further, stating that his attempt to restrain her from leaving in Act II can legally be construed as attempted rape. Mamet’s moral ambiguity has flourished.

It’s inaccurate to say that victimization is created here through physical means – while John is certainly stronger than Carol, we haven’t seen him continually overpower her physically. Psychologically, Carol is pushing her authority on John, but audience members may recall their sympathy for her in Act I. Without a clear-cut means of victimization through the events onstage or by characterization, where does sympathy for either character come from? It comes from the situation itself – from the socially recognizable “scandal” of sexual harassment. Both characters experience an element of sociocultural victimization (harm/oppression brought on by an outside force) and both

struggle against it (Carol takes action against John, and John fights here the entire way) but both characters are endowed with power or authority by the social structure in which the play takes place. Over the course of this study, a victim's active or passive granting of authority on the victimizer plays a key role in creating victimization, but in Oleanna the endowment comes from the culturally recognized structure of tenure committee, professor, and student.

Toward the end of Act III, John's fear, anger, and frustration are mounting, at which point he intercepts a call from his wife. Carol takes one last jab at him:

CAROL (*exiting*):

...and don't call your wife "baby."

JOHN:

What?

CAROL:

Don't call your wife baby. You heard what I said. (Mamet 47)

Enraged, John jumps up from his desk and beats her. As she falls to the floor, John picks up a chair and means to strike her with it. He pauses, then suddenly returns to his desk.

The final act ends with an appropriately ambiguous statement from Carol: "...yes. That's right."

When this play premiered, the political issue of sexual harassment ("he said versus she said") was quite present in the eyes of America, with the Hill-Thomas trials. Here, Mamet creates a flowing sense of victim – in each act we watch the power struggle between John and Carol ebb and flow, with each taking their turns as aggressor. By



combining a fluid hierarchy of authority, moral ambiguity, and a culturally poignant subject, Mamet contorts the always subjective sense of victimization into a debate.

It can be understandably argued either way that John or Carol took advantage of or oppressed the other – this is the beauty of Oleanna. The premier in New York City reportedly led to blows outside the theatre from patrons debating and arguing “whose side” they were on. For Oleanna, the play isn’t simply a storyline with “victim” and “aggressor,” but a balanced authority structure that leads to the debate of victim itself.

I began this chapter with questions about the concept of victim in an ambiguous, nonlinear, changing contemporary theatre world. Without the polarity of good versus evil, authority and oppression become incredibly difficult to demonstrate – and I had serious doubts about crafting a framework with which to view “victim” in nonrealistic theatre. In my analysis of the 1920s and 30s, characters themselves had to actively create the many elements of sociocultural victimization. In contemporary nonlinear theatre, the setting, theme, or overarching philosophy may take that role.

I still feel that “victim” has been lost in the so-called “collage” plays Fuchs references in Death of Character – it has instead been replaced with an evocative culturally recognizable dictionary of images and symbols. However, through analysis of Stripped and Oleanna, I have found that victim can still be inferred amidst moral and character ambiguity. Blurred lines and blurred characterizations seem to push playwrights to rethink and recreate authority and oppression in new and effective ways. It appears now that contemporary theatre has brought the analysis and creation of victimization out of the theorist’s notes and into the very structure of a play.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This study's main goal was to establish the beginnings of a definition for the complex concept of victimization in theatrical works. The term "victim" itself is so large, and used so frequently today, that defining it meant finding an explanation much more detailed than that in any dictionary. I used deductive reasoning to break down several notions of victim, but ultimately settled on sociocultural victimization as the focus for this study.

My research was driven by a list of questions that grew broader with time: Why is O'Neill's Yank considered a victim? What constitutes "victim"? What are the different kinds of victimization? What are the elements of each? Why do we care about Yank's characterization as victim? Does this framework apply to victimization today? Has the concept changed or evolved?

After this long process, I'm not sure I can say that I have a perfect series of answers for these questions. What I have found is that the answers to many of these questions are increasingly complex. I have gathered examples of socially accepted victimization – but these definitions will change with each different perspective. I have meticulously dissected a production to find each literary or directorial device that might connote power, authority, or victim to the audience – but so much of these connotations are based on a cultural understanding or context. While my research has led me to determine that to create victim there must be some balance of authority – be it inferred through culturally recognized images or blatantly stated with black-and-white polarity. If I were to repeat this research in ten years, I might find a different climate all together.

I have also found that in order to craft a sense of sociocultural victimization, a balance of authority and/or power must be created. The victim in question must endow the victimizer with the power to inflict harm or oppression on them. However, the existence of authority and/or power alone does not necessarily create victim -- harm or oppression inflicted by an outside source and an acknowledgement of or struggle against the harm or oppression must also be made clear.

In the realistic canonical pieces of the 1920s and 30s, these concepts are best represented in a strong polarity between characters: rich and poor, altruistic and sinister, or greedy and kind. While many of these realistic characterizations are at times blurred (we can argue that O'Neill's Mildred is a victim, or that the faceless army on 5th Avenue are victims of their circumstance), an overall emphasis on one character or group as a victim of the same oppressors exists.

Nonlinear and nonrealistic contemporary theatre takes these minor blurred lines and increases them to a new level. I can say with a great deal of certainty that the concepts of character, authority, oppression, and victim have evolved to a point where imagery and symbolism are taking the place of the once-sacred linear plotline with polar opposites of good and evil. Moral compasses are unreadable, definitions of gender and role are blurred, and the very definition of a character's "death" in a play no longer means they won't reappear on the stage. I have found that "victim," or any other characterization for that matter, must now be suggested or symbolized to find its place. My Chapter Two and Three lens for viewing victim had to be entirely refocused.

As I worked on this thesis, I was surprised how frequently my personal sympathies came into play. My own beliefs about the American "Rags to Riches" story,

economic opportunity, and characters allowing themselves to be victims continued to arise. While these opinions will vary by person, should I have an opportunity to revisit this subject matter in the future, research would certainly include an audience study to look for such sympathies. This study has opened up new questions for me about semiotics, audience reaction, and cultural climates; without a scientific audience trial it is difficult to determine how these factors contribute to the successful creation of victimization.

Through the course of this study, my own notions of active versus passive victimization (a character allowing his or herself to become a victim instead of fighting against it) have changed. I had originally believed Yank to be representative of a 1930s American laborer who had the opportunity, should he have wished, to advance himself up the social ladder. After completing this study and taking an in-depth look at other characterizations of victim my sympathies and understanding now lie with Yank as a victim. While Yank's primary oppressor was the social class system (his educational quality and employment opportunities), I have found a distinct intellectual liability in Yank.

This research has also opened up a series of new questions for me. Where is the concept of victim going? Are labels like "victim," "aggressor," and "oppressed" even relevant in today's theatrical climate? If not, what labels are taking their place? If, as Fuchs suggests, the once-offensive performances of the avant-garde world are no longer offensive, will we see a return to "traditional" theatrical styles? What will the "victim" of tomorrow look like?

It seems that one of O'Neill's distraught characters, Mary from his 1956 Long Day's Journey Into Night, might have the beginnings of an answer:

The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future, too. (O'Neill 90)

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